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EARLY REVIEWS OF GREAT WRITERS.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE casual reader of the present day, who is accustomed, comfortably seated in an easy-chair, to obtain all information on current literature by turning over the pages of some newspaper or magazine, is probably far from realising that the art of reviewing is practically a growth of this century. It is true that from 1680, when the *Mercurius Librarius* undertook to give "a faithful account of all books and pamphlets," a tolerably complete series of reviews of English literature can be got together, but they are for the most part mere notices of publication, with one or two extracts occasionally added, or else dismal summaries from which every particle of interest the original may have possessed has entirely evaporated. A vision rises up of the poor Grub Street hack who earned his scanty living by such work, sitting shivering and dinnerless in his garret, plodding his weary way through the long paragraphs, with his one shirt in the wash-tub, and the sheriff's officer waiting round the corner. Little was expected of him, no literary acumen, no originality, no comparisons or criticisms, not even style, only the power of producing the kind of summary the average school-girl makes of a chapter of Bright's *History of England.* He belonged to the great Empire of Dulness

satirised by Pope in the *Dunciad*. It is small wonder that the works of the immortals are as often as not dismissed by such reviewers in a few curt lines. Rousseau, the revered oracle of the French Revolution, struck his contemporaries in his letter to D'Alembert as "sprightly, entertaining, and ingenious," and modern opinion would probably endorse the further remark that he was not "the most discerning politician, or profound philosopher." The *Monthly Review* considers that the *Vicar of Wakefield* has "defects enough to put the reader out of all patience with an author capable of so strangely under-writing himself," though on the other hand "it deserves our warmest approbation for its moral tendency; particularly for the exemplary manner in which it recommends and enforces the great obligations of universal BENEVOLENCE: the most amiable quality that can possibly distinguish and adorn the WORTHY MAN and GOOD CHRISTIAN!" The *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1749 takes no notice of *Tom Jones*, beyond recording its publication and inserting a few lines in its praise from an anonymous admirer; but there is a "View and Plan of Noah's Ark," with all the carefully-drawn birds and beasts looking out from their carefully-drawn cages and stalls, Noah and his family walking down the middle passages, and several pages of explanatory letterpress. It is difficult at first to believe that the following refers to Gray's masterpiece:—"An Elegy wrote in a country church-yard. 4to, Dodsley, 6d., seven pages. The excellency of this little piece more than compensates for its lack of quantity."

A very large proportion of the dull reviews of the 18th

century are on equally dull books long since consigned to merciful oblivion. Innumerable sermons were printed in those days, not collected into one or more volumes as is now done, but each published separately for sixpence or a shilling, the occasion on which it was preached carefully noted. Almost every "catalogue of new books" contains a long list of them. Who bought them? who read them? what has become of all those quarto pages of last century theology? If they are still in existence, are they ever disturbed in their dusty seclusion on the shelves of the British Museum? Many, very many, of the other publications of the age appear to the modern mind equally uninteresting. Open at random a volume of the *History of the Works of the Learned.* For November 1742 the contents are as follows:—"A Continuation of the Life and Reign of David, King of Israel," one of six or seven articles on the same book; a notice of Middleton's "Epistles of Cicero," giving an account of the controversy between Dr. Middleton and Mr. Tunstall; some remarks on a "General System of Surgery," by Dr. Laurence Heister; the substance of an elegy on the death of M. Rollin, "spoken by M. de Boze, in the Royal Academy of Belles-Lettres, according to Custom, November 14th 1741, after the Decease of that most excellent Man." This number is an exception to most, for Rollin's and Middleton's are still well-known names; but it must be owned that the table of contents is not promising when compared with that of a modern literary review. Volume upon volume of the old magazines generally contain nothing but insipid summaries of the forgotten works of unknown authors.

In the 18th century most of the publishers found it convenient to have their own private organ, in which their own publications could be puffed, and those of their rivals depreciated; and several pages could be filled with the names alone of such periodicals. They afford dreary reading, all the more for the apparently inexhaustible supply of it; and in spite of the comical effect produced at times by the stilted phraseology and pedantic truisms, a certain melancholy creeps on as page after page falls under the eye—the coarse rough paper browned by time, the pale print with its long old-fashioned s's slowly fading into illegibility, and carrying with it all record of

> "The ghosts of words and dusty dreams,
> Old memories, faiths infirm and dead."

Will future generations find modern criticism, the brilliant essays on the books which stir mankind, as jejune and uninteresting?

Among its many contemporaries the *Monthly Review, or Literary Journal by several Hands*, stands out conspicuously excellent. It was begun by Ralph Griffiths in 1749, edited by him till 1803, when he was succeeded by his son, and lived on till 1845. If not very profound, its criticisms were thoroughly honest and impartial, as will be seen by the three subsequent specimens. Many of the magazines very largely took the place of the modern newspaper, containing summaries of Parliamentary debates, notices of births, deaths, and marriages, bills of mortality, meteorological tables, short accounts of foreign events, accidents, storms, shipwrecks,

executions, etc. By far the best of this class are the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1731), the *London Magazine* (1732), and the *Scots Magazine* (1739), all of which, though they furnish very little literary criticism, are full of vast stories of miscellaneous information of the most varied kinds, largely supplied by voluntary contributors. But the sleepy old times came to an end with the French Revolution. When the excited public mind was no longer content to wait a month for its news, a host of daily papers sprang into existence, and the magazines were forced to depend on literary matter alone. Accounts of books, written solely with a view to the publisher's interests, naturally did not stand high in the public estimation; there was both opportunity and need for a high-class, independent, critical review, and Francis Jeffrey, afterwards Lord Jeffrey, a young Edinburgh advocate, saw his chance, and brought out the first number of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802.

The idea of setting up a journal is said to have originated with Sydney Smith, who was living in Edinburgh at the time. He states that "towards the close of my residence in Edinburgh, Brougham, Jeffrey, and myself happened to meet in the eighth or ninth storey or flat, the then elevated residence of Mr. Jeffrey. I proposed that we should set up a review: this was acceded to with acclamation. I was appointed editor, and remained long enough in Edinburgh to edit the first number of the Review." Whoever originated the idea, the credit of the work belongs to Jeffrey, who alone had the requisite literary experience.

His chief associates were Smith, Horner, and Brougham, afterwards Lord Brougham, all of them eager, clever young men of strong Whig tendencies, whose very soul rose against the system of Tory repression which was then deemed necessary for the safety of the country. From the very first the *Edinburgh Review* "stood on two legs," as Jeffrey said, and caused quite as much sensation by its political as by its literary articles. Parliamentary reform, the abolition of slavery, Roman Catholic emancipation, the education of the labouring classes, the liberty of the press—all the great measures of the Whig party were advocated again and again in the most uncompromising language. So bold was the venture at first thought that some doubts seem to have existed as to the safety of the reviewers, and when the first number was under discussion Sydney Smith insisted that they should come singly, by back entrances and different lanes, to the dingy rooms off Willison's printing office in Craig's Close, where they held their conferences. The Old Town of Edinburgh is now cautiously explored by the enterprising tourist in some amazement at the height of the houses, the narrowness and steepness of the lanes and passages, and the dirt and drunkenness of the inhabitants, but all its former glory of rank, beauty, and fashion was not quite gone when the *Edinburgh Review* burst like a bombshell out of Craig's Close on an astonished world. "The effect was electrical," says Lord Cockburn in his *Life of Lord Jeffrey*. "And instead of expiring, as many wished, in their first effort, the force of the shock was increased on each subsequent discharge. It is impossible for those who

did not live at the time, and in the heat of the scene, to feel, or almost to understand, the impression made by the new luminary, or the anxieties with which its motions were observed. It was an entire and instant change of everything that the public had been accustomed to in that sort of composition. The old periodical opiates were extinguished at once." The change from the old style was marked by the magazine being only published quarterly, the editors stating in their advertisement to the first number that they intend "to decline any attempt at exhibiting a complete view of modern literature, and to confine their notice, in a great degree, to works that have either attained, or deserve, a certain portion of celebrity." Another and less laudable feature, made familiar to all readers by Macaulay's re-published essays, was the absolute, at times almost insolent, certainty with which they delivered their verdicts on all things human and divine—theology, science, politics, literature, poetry, surgery, mathematics, and the fine arts. The inevitable mistakes which arose were intensified by such language. The most notorious case was the downright abuse to which the Lake School of Poetry, and more especially Wordsworth, was for many years treated. "Poetry," the article on Southey's *Thalaba* begins, "has this much, at least, in common with religion, that its standards were fixed long ago, by certain inspired writers, whose authority it is no longer lawful to question;" and the writer goes on to accuse the new school of being "*dissenters* from the established systems in poetry and criticism." Starting with such a thesis, it is obvious that Wordsworth

and his friends, whose very object it was to put an end to the frigid classical correctness in vogue, could meet with little mercy. They accomplished the revolution, and the world has been slowly educated to appreciate it, but at the time the Edinburgh reviewers merely expressed in very clear and trenchant language the common opinion of the day. A more pardonable mistake was Brougham's savage attack on Lord Byron's *Hours of Idleness;* but this was afterwards fully atoned for by a complete and appreciative notice of the poet's greatness. Yet when all this is said, the merits of the first of the quarterlies far outweigh its faults and failings, and it would be hard to find better specimens of reviewing than the articles on Burns, on Madame de Stael, or, in Carlyle's own peculiar style, that on the *Corn-Law Rhymes.* It was, in striking contrast to the periodicals it displaced, absolutely independent, treating all subjects it touched with perfect fearlessness; it was bright, talented, and spirited; and above all it was, and will still be found to be, eminently readable. A sort of committee used at first to meet and settle on the articles for the forthcoming number, but this arrangement was soon found to be inconvenient, and Jeffrey was appointed editor. He held the post till 1829, when he was succeeded by Macvey Napier. From the beginning he went on the principle of obtaining the best talent by paying highly; ten guineas a sheet were at first given, but the minimum was soon raised, and two-thirds of the articles averaged from twenty to twenty-five guineas. Each number cost six shillings, and appeared in a buff and blue cover. Constable of Edinburgh

was the publisher, and the first three numbers were given to him, he taking the risk, and defraying the charges.

The *Edinburgh Review* reigned undisturbed till 1809, when a brilliant rival sprang up in the *Quarterly Review*, started by John Murray at the instigation of Sir Walter Scott. William Gifford was the first editor, and subsequently Sir S. T. Coleridge, and J. G. Lockhart, Sir Walter Scott's son-in-law. The politics of the *Quarterly* were strongly Tory, otherwise the new magazine very much followed the lines of the *Edinburgh*. The same impressions are left on the mind by similar size of paper, type, length of articles, general style, strong opinions strongly expressed, and, at times it must be added, similar gross misjudgments. All have heard of the article on Keats' *Endymion*, which for so long was erroneously supposed to have hastened his death, though it is only fair to state that the corresponding criticism in *Blackwood's Magazine* is far worse in its personal spitefulness. Still the *Quarterly* has the merits as well as the faults of the *Edinburgh*, and their rivalry rendered undoubted service to literature.

Blackwood's Magazine began as a monthly in 1817, and from the first struck out a line of its own. The political and social articles were lighter in treatment and style, belles-lettres received greater prominence, and the practice of publishing a novel in successive numbers, that most distinctive feature of the modern magazine, was first begun in its pages. Michael Scott, Warren, Bulwer Lytton, Lever, George Eliot, Mrs. Oliphant, Anthony Trollope, Charles Reade, and Laurence Oliphant are

EARLY REVIEWS
OF GREAT WRITERS.

THE MONTHLY REVIEW.

The Monthly Review, December 1786.

POEMS, CHIEFLY IN THE SCOTTISH DIALECT.

By ROBERT BURNS.

8vo. Kilmarnock. No imprint. 1786.

Poeta nascitur non fit is an old maxim, the truth of which has been generally admitted; and although it be certain that in modern times many verses are manufactured from the brain of their authors with as much labour as the iron is drawn into form under the hammer of the smith, and require to be afterwards smoothed by the file with as much care as the burnishers of Sheffield employ to give the last finish to their wares; yet after all these verses, though ever so smooth, are nothing but *verses*, and have no genuine title to the name of *Poems*. The humble bard, whose work now demands our attention, cannot claim a place among these polished *versifiers*. His simple strains, artless and unadorned, seem to flow without effort from the native feelings of the heart. They are always nervous, sometimes inelegant, often natural, simple and sublime. The objects that have obtained the attention of the Author are humble; for he himself, born in a low station, and following a laborious employment, has had no opportunity of observing

scenes in the higher walks of life; yet his verses are sometimes struck off with a delicacy and artless simplicity that charms like the bewitching though irregular touches of a Shakespeare. We much regret that these poems are written in some measure in an unknown tongue, which must deprive most of our Readers of the pleasure they would otherwise naturally create; being composed in the Scottish dialect, which contains many words that are altogether unknown to an English reader: beside, they abound with allusions to the modes of life, opinions, and ideas of the people in a remote corner of the country, which would render many passages obscure, and consequently uninteresting, to those who perceive not the forcible accuracy of the picture of the objects to which they allude. This work, therefore, can only be fully relished by the natives of that part of the country where it was produced; but by such of *them* as have a taste sufficiently refined to be able to relish the beauties of nature, it cannot fail to be highly prized.

By what we can collect from the poems themselves, and the short preface to them, the author seems to be struggling with poverty, though cheerfully supporting the fatigues of a laborious employment. He thus speaks of himself in one of the poems—

"The star that rules my luckless lot,
Has fated me the russet coat,
And damn'd my fortune to the groat;
But, in requite,
Has blest me with a random shot
Of country wit."

He afterward adds—

"This life, sae far's I understand,
Is an enchanted fairy land,
Where pleasure is the magic wand,
That, wielded right,
Makes hours and minutes hand in hand
Dance by fu' light.

The magic wand then let us wield ;
For ance that five and forty's speeld
See crazy, weary, joyless Eild,
With wrinkled face,
Comes hostan, hirplan owre the field,
With creeping pace.

When ance life's day draws near the gloamin',
Then farewell vacant, careless roamin',
And farewell cheerful tankards foamin',
And social noise ;
And farewell dear deluding woman,
The joy of joys !"

Fired with the subject, he then bursts into a natural, warm, and glowing description of youth—

"O life ! how pleasant in thy morning,
Young Fancy's rays the hills adorning !
Cold-pausing Caution's lesson scorning,
We frisk away,
Like school-boys, at th' expected warning,
To joy and play.

We wander there, we wander here,
We eye the rose upon the brier,
Unmindful that the *thorn* is near,
Among the leaves ;
And though the puny wound appear,
Short time it grieves."

"None of the following works" (we are told in the preface) "were ever composed with a view to the press. To amuse himself with the little creations of his own fancy, amid the toil and fatigues of a laborious life; to transcribe the various feelings, the loves, the griefs, the hopes, the fears in his own breast; to find some kind of counterpoise to the struggles of a world, always an alien scene, a task uncouth to the poetical mind—these were his motives for courting the muses, and in these he found poetry its own reward."

These poems are chiefly in the comic strain. Some are of the descriptive cast, particularly *Hallow-e'en*, which contains a lively picture of the magical tricks that still are practised in the country at that season. It is a valuable relic which, like Virgil's eighth Eclogue, will preserve the memory of these simple incantations long after they would otherwise have been lost. It is very properly accompanied with notes explaining the circumstances to which the poem alludes. Sometimes the poems are in the elegiac strain, among which class the Reader will find much of nature in the lines to a mouse, on turning up her nest with the plough, in November 1785, and those to a mountain daisy, on turning one down with the plough, in April 1786. In these we meet with a strain of that delicate tenderness which renders the Idylls of Madame Deshouliers so peculiarly interesting. Some of the poems are in a more serious strain; and as these contain fewer words that are not pure English than the others,

we shall select one as a specimen of our Author's manner.

The poem we have selected exhibits a beautiful picture of that simplicity of manners which still, we are assured on the best authority, prevails in those parts of the country where the author dwells. That it may be understood by our Readers, it is accompanied by a Glossary and Notes, with which we have been favoured by a friend who thoroughly understands the language, and has often, he says, witnessed with his own eyes that pure simplicity of manners which are delineated with the most faithful accuracy in this little performance. We have used the freedom to modernise the orthography a little, wherever the measure would permit, to render it less disgusting to our Readers south of the Tweed.[1]

. . . . . .

These stanzas are *serious*. But our Author seems to be most in his own element when in the sportive, humorous strain. The poems of this cast, as hath been already hinted, so much abound with provincial phrases and allusions to local circumstances, that no extract from them would be sufficiently intelligible to our English Readers.

The modern ear will be somewhat disgusted with the measure of many of these pieces, which is faithfully copied from that which was most in fashion among the ancient Scottish Bards, but hath been, we think with good reason, laid aside by later Poets.

[1] Here follows an Anglified version of the "Cotter's Saturday Night."—EDITOR.

The versification is in general easy, and it seems to have been a matter of indifference to our Author in what measure he wrote. But, if ever he should think of offering anything more to the public, we are of opinion his performances would be more highly valued were they written in measures less antiquated. The few Songs, Odes, Dirges, etc., in this collection are very poor in comparison of the other pieces. The Author's mind is not sufficiently stored with brilliant ideas to succeed in that line.

In justice to the Reader, however, as well as the Author, we must observe that this collection may be compared to a heap of wheat carelessly winnowed. Some grain of a most excellent quality is mixed with a little chaff, and half-ripened corn. How many splendid volumes of poems come under our review, in which, though the mere chaff be carefully separated, not a single atom of perfect grain can be found, all being light and insipid! We never reckon our task fatiguing when we can find, even among a great heap, a single pearl of price; but how pitiable is our lot when we must toil and toil and can find nothing but tiresome uniformity, with neither fault to rouse nor beauty to animate the jaded spirits!

The Monthly Review, May 1799.

LYRICAL BALLADS, WITH A FEW OTHER POEMS.

12mo, 210 pp. 5s., boards. Arch. 1798.

THE author of these ingenious compositions presents the major part of them to the public as *experiments;* since they were written, as he informs us in the *advertisement* prefixed, "chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure."

Though we have been extremely entertained with the fancy, the facility, and (in general) the sentiments of these pieces, we cannot regard them as *poetry* of a class to be cultivated at the expense of a higher species of versification, unknown in our language at the time when our elder writers, whom this author condescends to imitate, wrote their ballads. Would it not be degrading poetry, as well as the English language, to go back to the barbarous and uncouth numbers of Chaucer? Suppose, instead of modernising the old bard, that the sweet and polished measures of lofty subjects, of Dryden, Pope, and Gray, were to be transmuted into the dialect and

versification of the fourteenth century? Should we be gainers by the retrogradation? *Rust* is a necessary quality to a counterfeit old medal; but, to give artificial rust to modern poetry, in order to render it similar to that of three or four hundred years ago, can have no better title to merit and admiration than may be claimed by any ingenious forgery. None but savages have submitted to eat acorns after corn was found. We will allow that the author before us has the art of cooking his acorns well, and that he makes a very palatable dish of them for *jours maigres*, but for festivals and *gala* days,

> "Multos castra juvant, and lituo tubae
> Permistus sonitus."

We have had pleasure in reading the *Reliques of Antient Poetry*, because it was antient, and because we were surprised to find so many beautiful thoughts in the rude numbers of barbarous times. These reasons will not apply to *imitations* of antique versification. We will not, however, dispute any longer about names; the author shall style his rustic delineations of low-life *poetry*, if he pleases, on the same principle on which Butler is called a poet and Teniers a painter; but are the doggerel verses of the one equal to the sublime numbers of a Milton, or are the Dutch boors of the other to be compared with the angels of Raphael or Guido? When we confess that our author has had the art of pleasing and interesting in no common way by his natural delineation of human passions, human characters, and human

incidents, we must add that these effects were not produced by the *poetry;* we have been as much affected by pictures of misery and unmerited distress in *prose.* The elevation of soul, when it is lifted into the higher regions of imagination, affords us a delight of a different kind from the sensation which is produced by the detail of common incidents. For this fact we have better authority than is to be found in the writings of most critics: we have it in a poet himself, whose award was never (till now) disputed—

> "The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
> And, as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name."—SHAKESPEARE.

Having said thus much on the *genus*, we now come more particularly to the *species.*

The author's first piece, *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere*, in imitation of the *style* as well as of the spirit of the elder poets, is the strangest story of a cock and bull that we ever saw on paper: yet, though it seems a rhapsody of unintelligible wildness and incoherence (of which we do not perceive the drift, unless the joke lies in depriving the wedding guest of his share of the feast), there are in it poetical touches of an exquisite kind.

The Dramatic Fragment, if it intends anything, seems meant to throw disgrace on the savage liberty preached by some modern *philosophes.*

The Yew-Tree seems a seat for *Jean Jaques;* while the reflections on the subject appear to flow from a more pious pen.

The Nightingale sings a strain of true and beautiful poetry; Miltonic, yet original; reflective and interesting, in an uncommon degree.

. . . . . .

The Female Vagrant is an agonising tale of individual wretchedness; highly coloured, though, alas! but too probable. Yet, as it seems to stamp a general stigma on all military transactions, which were never more important in free countries than at the present period, it will perhaps be asked whether the hardships described never happen during revolution, or in a nation subdued? The sufferings of individuals during war are dreadful; but is it not better to try to prevent them from becoming general, or to render them transient by heroic and patriotic efforts, than to fly to them for ever?

Distress from poverty and want is admirably described in *The True Story of Goody Blake and Harry Gill;* but are we to imagine that Harry was bewitched by Goody Blake? The hardest heart must be softened into pity for the poor old woman; and yet, if all the poor are to help themselves, and supply their wants from the possessions of their neighbours, what imaginary wants and real anarchy would it not create? Goody Blake should have been relieved out of the *two millions* annually allowed by the State to the poor of this country, not by the plunder of an individual.

Lines on the first mild day of March abound with beautiful sentiments from a polished mind.

Simon Lee, the old Huntsman, is the portrait, admirably painted, of every huntsman who, by toil, age, and infirmities, is rendered unable to guide and govern his canine family.

Anecdote for Fathers. Of this the dialogue is ingenious and natural; but the object of the child's choice, and the inferences, are not quite obvious.

We are Seven. Innocent and pretty infantine prattle.

On an Early Spring. The first stanza of this little poem seems unworthy of the rest, which contain reflections truly pious and philosophical.

The Thorn. All our author's pictures, in colouring, are dark as those of Rembrandt or Spanioletto.

The Last of the Flock is more gloomy than the rest. We are not told how the wretched hero of this piece became so poor. He had, indeed, ten children: but so have many cottagers; and ere the tenth child is born, the eldest begin to work, and help, at least, to maintain themselves. No oppression is pointed out; nor are any means suggested for his relief. If the author be a wealthy man, he ought not to have suffered this poor peasant to part with *the last of the flock.* What but an agrarian law can prevent poverty from visiting the door of the indolent, injudicious, extravagant, and, perhaps, vicious? and is it certain that rigid equality of property as well as of laws could remedy this evil?

The Dungeon. Here candour and tenderness for

criminals seem pushed to excess. Have not jails been built on the humane Mr. Howard's plan, which have almost ruined some counties, and which look more like palaces than habitations for the perpetrators of crime? Yet, have fewer crimes been committed in consequence of the erection of those magnificent structures, at an expense which would have maintained many in innocence and comfort out of a jail, if they have been driven to theft by want?

The Mad Mother. Admirable painting! in Michael Angelo's bold and masterly manner.

The Idiot Boy leads the reader on from anxiety to distress, and from distress to terror, by incidents and alarms which, though of the most mean and ignoble kind, interest, frighten, and terrify, almost to torture, during the perusal of more than a hundred stanzas.

Lines written near Richmond. Literally "most musical, most melancholy!"

Expostulation and Reply. The author tells us that "these lines, and those which follow, arose out of conversation with a friend who was somewhat unreasonably attached to modern books of moral philosophy." These two pieces will afford our readers an opportunity of judging of the author's poetical talents, in a more modern and less gloomy style than his ballads.

. . . . . .

The Old Man Travelling: a Sketch. Finely drawn, but the termination seems pointed against the war; from which, however, we are now no more able to separate ourselves than Hercules was to free himself

from the shirt of Nessus. The old traveller's son might have died by disease.

Each ballad is a tale of woe. The style and versification are those of our ancient ditties; but much polished, and more constantly excellent. In old songs we have only a fine line or stanza now and then: here we meet with few that are feeble—but it is *poesie larmoiante.* The author is more plaintive than Gray himself.

The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman. Another tale of woe! of the most afflicting and harrowing kind. The want of humanity here falls not on wicked Europeans, but on the innocent Indian savages, who enjoy unlimited freedom and liberty, unbridled by kings, magistrates, or laws.

The Convict. What a description! and what misplaced commiseration, on one condemned by the laws of his country, which he had confessedly violated! We do not comprehend the drift of lavishing that tenderness and compassion on a criminal which should be reserved for virtue in unmerited misery and distress, suffering untimely death from accident, injustice, or disease.

Lines written near Tintern Abbey. The reflections of no common mind; poetical, beautiful, and philosophical: but somewhat tinctured with gloomy, narrow, and unsociable ideas of seclusion from the commerce of the world; as if men were born to live in woods and wilds, unconnected with each other! Is it not to education and the culture of the mind that we owe the raptures which the author so well describes, as

arising from the view of beautiful scenery and sublime objects of nature enjoyed in tranquillity, when contrasted with the artificial machinery and "busy hum of men" in a city? The savage sees none of the beauties which this author describes. The convenience of food and shelter, which vegetation affords him, is all his concern; he thinks not of its picturesque beauties, the course of rivers, the height of mountains, etc. He has no *dizzy raptures* in youth, nor does he listen in maturer age "to the still sad music of humanity."

So much genius and originality are discovered in this publication, that we wish to see another from the same hand, written on more elevated subjects and in a more cheerful disposition.

The Monthly Review, January 1817.

CHRISTABEL; KUBLA KHAN, A VISION; THE PAINS OF SLEEP.

By S. T. COLERIDGE, Esq.

8vo, 64 *pp.* 4*s.* 6*d.*, *sewed. Murray*, 1816.

In a very circumstantial though short preface Mr. Coleridge informs us that *Christabel* was written long ago; that consequently all marks of plagiarism which may be discovered in it are only chance coincidences; and also that the metre of *Christabel*, though irregular, still has a "method in its madness," and "counts the accents, not the syllables, in each line." This variation from every former rule of versification is called "a new principle"; and the reader is to be reasoned into a belief that a line of ten syllables is no longer than one of five, if there be no more emphatic syllables (for this is all that the author means by accent) in the one than in the other.

We have long since condemned in Mr. Scott and in Miss Holford, and in fifty other males and females, the practice of arbitrary pronunciation, assumed as a principle for regulating the length or rhythm of a verse; and we hereby declare to all whom it may

concern, that they are guilty of neither more nor less than bombastic *prose*, and not even conscious of *bombastic* verse, who rest their hopes on the acquiescence of their readers in their own "arbitrary pronunciation." Let those readers only weigh and measure a few of Mr. Coleridge's lines in this poem of *Christabel*, which unfortunately was so long delayed in its publication, and which really did *not* pilfer anything from previous poems. Let them form their opinion, and then let them say whether Mr. Coleridge originally conceived, or surreptitiously obtained, such superb ideas!

> "'Tis the middle of night by the castle clock!
> And the owls have awaken'd the crowing cock;
> Tu-whit!—Tu-whoo!
> And hark, again! the crowing cock,
> How drowsily it crew."

Are we to be told that this is *nature?* "*Avec permission, Monsieur,*" etc., etc. (as Voltaire said in Dr. Moore's *Travels*), we do not allow the plea. When Virgil describes the dead hour of night. When Homer in a still bolder manner strikes out the scene before us; when Shakespeare, boldest, truest, and yet gentlest of all, presents the same picture to our eyes; they all fill their canvas with living objects, and with actual sounds: but they are all equally above that imitative harmony, that affected adaptation of sound to sense, which nothing but German music and German poetry could ever have attempted. They would have started with horror and astonishment from such

an effort, in any language, as that which Mr. Coleridge is constantly making; namely, to dignify meanness of conception, to versify the flattest prose, and to teach the human ear a new and discordant system of harmony.

We shall give the public one opportunity of judging of this extravagant but not ingenious production—

> "Yea, she doth smile, and she doth weep,
> Like a youthful hermitess,
> Beauteous in a wilderness,
> Who, praying always, prays in sleep.
> And if she move unquietly,
> Perchance, 'tis but the blood so free,
> Comes back and tingles in her feet.
> No doubt, she hath a vision sweet.
> What if her guardian spirit 'twere?
> What if she knew her mother near?
> But this she knows, in joys and woes,
> That saints will aid if men will call:
> For the blue sky bends over all!"

This precious production is not finished, but we are to have more and more of it in future! It would be truly astonishing that such rude unfashioned stuff should be tolerated, and still more that it should be praised by men of genius, (witness Lord Byron and some others), were we not convinced that every principle of correct writing, as far as poetry is concerned, has been long *given up;* and that the observance, rather than the breach, of such rules is considered as an incontrovertible proof of rank stupidity. It is grand, in a word, it is sublime, to be lawless; and whoever writes the wildest nonsense

in the quickest and newest manner is the popular poet of the day! Whether this sentence be considered as a positive truth, or as a splenetic effusion, by the different parties who *now* divide the literary world, we think that the time is fast approaching when all minds will be agreed on it; and when any versifier who widely differs from the established standard of our nobler authors will be directly remanded into that Limbo of vanity from which he most certainly emerged.

The fragment of *Kubla Khan* is declared to have been composed in a dream, and is published as the author wrote it. Allowing every possible accuracy to the statement of Mr. Coleridge, we would yet ask him whether this extraordinary fragment was not rather the effect of rapid and instant composition after he was awake, than of memory immediately recording that which he dreamt when asleep? By what process of consciousness could he distinguish between such composition and such reminiscence? Impressed as his mind was with his interesting dream, and habituated as he is (notwithstanding his accidental cessation from versifying) to the momentary production of verse, will he venture to assert that he did not *compose*, and that he did *remember*, the lines before us? Were they dreamt, or were they spontaneously poured forth instantly after the dream,

> "Without stop or stay,
> Down the rocky way
> That leads," etc., etc.?

His "psychological curiosity," as he terms it, depends in no slight degree on the establishment of the previous fact which we have mentioned: but the poem itself is below criticism. We would dismiss it with some portentous words of Sir Kenelm Digby, in his observations on Browne's *Religio Medici*:—"I have much ado to believe what he speaketh confidently: that he is more beholding to Morpheus for learned and rational as well as pleasing dreams, than to Mercury for smart and facetious conceptions."

The Pains of Sleep, a little poem at the end of the pamphlet, has some better verses in it than its predecessors. Without in the least approving the spirit, we admire the simplicity of the following lines:—

"Ere on my bed my limbs I lay,
It hath not been my use to pray
With moving lips or bended knees;
But silently, by slow degrees,
My spirit I to love compose,
In humble trust mine eye-lids close,
With reverential resignation,
No wish conceived, no thought expressed!
Only a *sense* of supplication;
A sense o'er all my soul imprest
That I am weak, yet not unblest,
Since in me, round me, everywhere
Eternal strength and wisdom are.
But yester-night I pray'd aloud
In anguish and in agony,
Up-starting from the fiendish crowd
Of shapes and thoughts that tortured me:
A lurid light, a trampling throng,

Sense of intolerable wrong,
And whom I scorn'd, those only strong!
Thirst of revenge, the powerless will
Still baffled, and yet burning still!
Desire with loathing strangely mixed
On wild or hateful objects fixed.
Fantastic passions! mad'ning brawl!
And shame and terror over all!
Deeds to be hid which were not hid,
Which all confused I could not know,
Whether I suffered, or I did:
For all seemed guilt, remorse, or woe,
My own or others still the same
Life-stifling fear, soul-stifling shame!"

We close the slight publication before us with unmingled regret. The author of *Remorse* may perhaps be able to explain our feeling better than ourselves: but that so much superior genius should be corrupted and debased by so much execrable taste must be a subject of sincere lamentation to every lover of the arts, and to every friend of poetry.

THE EDINBURGH REVIEW.

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"THALABA, THE DESTROYER."

A Metrical Romance. By ROBERT SOUTHEY.

2 vols., 12mo. London.

Poetry has this much, at least, in common with religion, that its standards were fixed long ago by certain inspired writers whose authority it is no longer lawful to call in question; and that many profess to be entirely devoted to it who have no *good works* to produce in support of their pretensions. The catholic poetical church, too, has worked but few miracles since the first ages of its establishment; and has been more prolific, for a long time, of doctors than of saints; it has had its corruptions and reformation also, and has given birth to an infinite variety of heresies and errors, the followers of which have hated and persecuted each other as cordially as other bigots.

The author who is now before us belongs to a *sect* of poets that has established itself in this country within these ten or twelve years, and is looked upon, we believe, as one of its chief champions and apostles. The peculiar doctrines of this sect it would not perhaps be very easy to explain; but that they are *dissenters* from the established systems in poetry and

criticism is admitted, and proved indeed, by the whole tenor of their compositions. Though they lay claim, we believe, to a creed and a revelation of their own, there can be little doubt that their doctrines are of *German* origin, and have been derived from some of the great modern reformers in that country. Some of their leading principles indeed are probably of an earlier date, and seem to have been borrowed from the great apostle of Geneva. As Mr. Southey is the first author of this persuasion that has yet been brought before us for judgment, we cannot discharge our inquisitorial office conscientiously, without premising a few words upon the nature and tendency of the tenets he has helped to promulgate.

The disciples of this school boast much of its originality, and seem to value themselves very highly for having broken loose from the bondage of ancient authority, and re-asserted the independence of genius. Originality, however, we are persuaded, is rarer than mere alteration, and a man may change a good master for a bad one without finding himself at all nearer to independence. That our new poets have abandoned the old models may certainly be admitted; but we have not been able to discover that they have yet created any models of their own, and are very much inclined to call in question the worthiness of those to which they have transferred their admiration. The productions of this school, we conceive, are so far from being entitled to the praise of originality, that they cannot be better characterised than by an enumeration of the sources from which their materials

have been derived. The greatest part of them, we apprehend, will be found to be composed of the following elements:—1. The anti-social principles and distempered sensibility of Rousseau—his discontent with the present constitution of society—his paradoxical morality, and his perpetual hankerings after some unattainable state of voluptuous virtue and perfection. 2. The simplicity and energy (*horresco referens*) of Kotzebue and Schiller. 3. The homeliness and harshness of some of Cowper's language and versifications, interchanged occasionally with the *innocence* of Ambrose Philips, or the quaintness of Quarles and Dr. Donne. From the diligent study of these few originals we have no doubt that an entire art of poetry may be collected, by the assistance of which the very *gentlest* of our readers may soon be qualified to compose a poem as correctly versified as *Thalaba*, and to deal out sentiment and description with all the sweetness of Lambe, and all the magnificence of Coleridge.

The authors of whom we are now speaking have, among them, unquestionably, a very considerable portion of poetical talent, and have, consequently, been enabled to seduce many into an admiration of the false taste (as it appears to us) in which most of their productions are composed. They constitute, at present, the most formidable conspiracy that has lately been formed against sound judgment in matters poetical; and are entitled to a larger share of our censorial notice than could be spared for an individual delinquent. We shall hope for the indulgence of our

readers, therefore, in taking this opportunity to inquire a little more particularly into their merits, and to make a few remarks upon those peculiarities which seem to be regarded by their admirers as the surest proofs of their excellence.

Their most distinguishing symbol is undoubtedly an affectation of great simplicity and familiarity of language. They disdain to make use of the common poetical phraseology, or to ennoble their diction by a selection of fine or dignified expressions. There would be too much *art* in this, for that great love of nature with which they are all of them inspired; and their sentiments, they are determined, shall be indebted, for their effect, to nothing but their intrinsic tenderness or elevation. There is something very noble and conscientious, we will confess, in this plan of composition; but the misfortune is, that there are passages in all poems that can neither be pathetic nor sublime; and that, on these occasions, a neglect of the embellishments of language is very apt to produce absolute meanness and insipidity. The language of passion, indeed, can scarcely be deficient in elevation; and when an author is awanting in that particular, he may commonly be presumed to have failed in the truth, as well as in the dignity of his expression. The case, however, is extremely different with the subordinate parts of a composition; with the narrative and description, that are necessary to preserve its connection; and the explanation that must frequently prepare us for the great scenes and splendid passages. In these, all the requisite ideas

may be conveyed, with sufficient clearness, by the meanest and most negligent expressions; and, if magnificence or beauty is ever to be observed in them, it must have been introduced from some other motive than that of adapting the style to the subject. It is in such passages, accordingly, that we are most frequently offended with low and inelegant expressions; and that the language, which was intended to be simple and natural, is found oftenest to degenerate into mere slovenliness and vulgarity. It is in vain, too, to expect that the meanness of those parts may be redeemed by the excellence of others. A poet, who aims at all at sublimity or pathos, is like an actor in a high tragic character, and must sustain his dignity throughout, or become altogether ridiculous. We are apt enough to laugh at the mock-majesty of those whom we know to be but common mortals in private; and cannot permit Hamlet to make use of a single provincial intonation, although it should only be in his conversation with the grave-diggers.

The followers of simplicity are, therefore, at all times in danger of occasional degradation; but the simplicity of this new school seems intended to ensure it. *Their* simplicity does not consist, by any means, in the rejection of glaring or superfluous ornament—in the substitution of elegance to splendour, or in that refinement of art which seeks concealment in its own perfection. It consists, on the contrary, in a very great degree, in the positive and *bonâ fide* rejection of art altogether, and in the bold use of those rude and negligent expressions, which

would be banished by a little discrimination. One of their own authors, indeed, has very ingenuously set forth (in a kind of manifesto that preceded one of their most flagrant acts of hostility) that it was their capital object "to adapt to the uses of poetry, the ordinary language of conversation among the middling and lower orders of the people." What advantages are to be gained by the success of this project we confess ourselves unable to conjecture. The language of the higher and more cultivated orders may fairly be presumed to be better than that of their inferiors; at any rate, it has all those associations in its favour, by means of which a style can ever appear beautiful or exalted, and is adapted to the purposes of poetry, by having been long consecrated to its use. The language of the vulgar, on the other hand, has all the opposite associations to contend with; and must seem unfit for poetry (if there were no other reason), merely because it has scarcely ever been employed in it. A great genius may indeed overcome these disadvantages; but we can scarcely conceive that he should court them. We may excuse a certain homeliness of language in the productions of a ploughman or a milkwoman; but we cannot bring ourselves to admire it in an author, who has had occasion to indite odes to his college bell, and inscribe hymns to the Penates.

But the mischief of this new system is not confined to the depravation of language only; it extends to the sentiments and emotions, and leads to the debasement of all those feelings which poetry is

designed to communicate. It is absurd to suppose, that an author should make use of the language of the vulgar, to express the sentiments of the refined. His professed object, in employing that language, is to bring his compositions nearer to the true standard of nature; and his intention to copy the sentiments of the lower orders is implied in his resolution to make use of their style. Now, the different classes of society have each of them a distinct character, as well as a separate idiom; and the names of the various passions to which they are subject respectively, have a signification that varies essentially, according to the condition of the persons to whom they are applied. The love, or grief, or indignation of an enlightened and refined character, is not only expressed in a different language, but is in itself a different emotion from the love, or grief, or anger of a clown, a tradesman, or a market-wench. The things themselves are radically and obviously distinct; and the representation of them is calculated to convey a very different train of sympathies and sensations to the mind. The question, therefore, comes simply to be—which of them is the most proper object for poetical imitation? It is needless for us to answer a question, which the practice of all the world has long ago decided irrevocably. The poor and vulgar may interest us in poetry by their *situation:* but never, we apprehend, by any sentiments that are peculiar to their condition, and still less by any language that is characteristic of it. The truth is, that it is impossible to copy their diction or their sentiments correctly, in a serious

composition; and this, not merely because poverty makes men ridiculous, but because just taste and refined sentiment are rarely to be met with among the uncultivated part of mankind; and a language, fitted for their expression, can still more rarely form any part of their "ordinary conversation." The low-bred heroes, and interesting rustics of poetry, have no sort of affinity to the real vulgar of this world; they are imaginary beings, whose characters and language are in contrast with their situation; and please those who can be pleased with them, by the marvellous, and not by the nature of such a combination. In serious poetry a man of the middling or lower order *must necessarily* lay aside a great deal of his ordinary language; he must avoid errors in grammar and orthography; and steer clear of the cant of particular professions, and of every impropriety that is ludicrous or disgusting; nay, he must speak in good verse, and observe all the graces in prosody and collocation. After all this, it may not be very easy to say how we are to find him out to be a low man, or what marks can remain of the ordinary language of conversation in the inferior orders of society. If there be any phrases that are not used in good society they will appear as blemishes in the composition, no less palpably than errors in syntax or quantity; and, if there be no such phrases, the style cannot be characteristic of that condition of life, the language of which it professes to have adopted. All approximation to that language, in the same manner, implies a deviation from that purity and

precision which no one, we believe, ever violated spontaneously.

It has been argued, indeed, (for men will argue in support of what they do not venture to practise), that as the middling and lower orders of society constitute by far the greater part of mankind, so their feelings and expressions should interest more extensively and may be taken, more fairly than any other, for the standards of what is natural and true. To this it seems obvious to answer that the arts that aim at exciting admiration and delight do not take their models from what is ordinary, but from what is excellent; and that our interest in the representation of any event does not depend upon our familiarity with the original, but on its intrinsic importance, and the celebrity of the parties it concerns. The sculptor employs his art in delineating the graces of Antinous or Apollo, and not in the representation of those ordinary forms that belong to the crowd of his admirers. When a chieftain perishes in battle, his followers mourn more for him than for thousands of their equals that may have fallen around him.

After all, it must be admitted that there is a class of persons, (we are afraid they cannot be called *readers*), to whom the representation of vulgar manners, in vulgar language, will afford much entertainment. We are afraid, however, that the ingenious writers who supply the hawkers and ballad-singers have very nearly monopolised that department, and are probably better qualified to hit the taste of their customers than Mr. Southey, or any of his brethren,

can yet pretend to be. To fit them for the higher task of original composition, it would not be amiss if they were to undertake a translation of Pope or Milton into the vulgar tongue, for the benefit of those children of nature.

There is still another disagreeable effect of this affected simplicity, which, though of less importance than those which have been already noticed, it may yet be worth while to mention. This is the extreme difficulty of supporting the same tone of expression throughout, and the inequality that is consequently introduced into the texture of the composition. To an author of reading and education, it is a style that must always be assumed and unnatural, and one from which he will be perpetually tempted to deviate. He will rise, therefore, every now and then above the level to which he has professedly degraded himself, and make amends for that transgression by a fresh effort of descension. His composition, in short, will be like that of a person who is attempting to speak in an obsolete or provincial dialect; he will betray himself by expressions of occasional purity and elegance, and exert himself to efface that impression by passages of unnatural meanness or absurdity.

In making these strictures on the perverted taste for simplicity, that seems to distinguish our modern school of poetry, we have no particular allusion to Mr. Southey or the production now before us. On the contrary, he appears to us to be less addicted to this fault than most of his fraternity; and if we were in want of examples to illustrate the preceding

observations, we should certainly look for them in the effusions of that poet who commemorates, with so much effect, the chattering of Harry Gills' teeth, tells the tale of the one-eyed huntsman "who had a cheek like a cherry," and beautifully warns his studious friend of the risk he ran of "growing double."

At the same time it is impossible to deny that the author of the *English Eclogues* is liable to a similar censure; and few persons, we believe, will peruse the following verses (taken, almost at random, from the *Thalaba*) without acknowledging that he still continues to deserve it.

"At midnight Thalaba started up,
For he felt that the ring on his finger was moved.
He called on Allah aloud,
And he called on the Prophet's name.
Moath arose in alarm:
'What ails thee, Thalaba?' he cried,
'Is the robber of night at hand?'
'Dost thou not see,' the youth exclaimed,
'A spirit in the Tent?'
Moath looked round, and said,
'The moonbeam shines in the Tent,
I see thee stand in the light,
And thy shadow is black on the ground.'
Thalaba answered not.
'Spirit!' he cried, 'what brings thee here?'" etc.

WOMAN.

"Go not among the Tombs, Old Man!
There is a madman there.

OLD MAN.

Will he harm me if I go?

WOMAN.

Not he, poor miserable man!
But 'tis a wretched sight to see
His utter wretchedness.
For all day long he lies on a grave,
And never is he seen to weep,
And never is he heard to groan,
Nor ever at the hour of prayer
Bends his knee, nor moves his lips.
I have taken him food for charity,
And never a word he spake;
But yet so ghastly he looked
That I have awakened at night." Etc.

Now this style, we conceive, possesses no one character of excellence; it is feeble, low, and disjointed; without elegance, and without dignity; the offspring, we should imagine, of mere indolence and neglect; or the unhappy fruit of a system that would teach us to undervalue that vigilance and labour which sustained the loftiness of Milton, and gave energy and direction to the pointed and fine propriety of Pope.

The *style* of our modern poets is that, no doubt, by which they are most easily distinguished; but their genius has also an internal character; and the peculiarities of their taste may be discovered without the assistance of their diction. Next after great familiarity of language there is nothing that appears to them so meritorious as perpetual exaggeration of

thought. There must be nothing moderate, natural, or easy, about their sentiments. There must be a "qu'il mourut," and a "let there be light," in every line; and all their characters must be in agonies and ecstasies, from their entrance to their exit. To those who are acquainted with their productions, it is needless to speak of the fatigue that is produced by this unceasing summons to admiration, or of the compassion which is excited by the spectacle of these eternal strainings and distortions. Those authors appear to forget that a whole poem cannot be made up of striking passages; and that the sensations produced by sublimity, are never so powerful and entire, as when they are allowed to subside and revive, in a slow and spontaneous succession. It is delightful, now and then, to meet with a rugged mountain, or a roaring stream; but where there is no sunny slope nor shaded plain to relieve them—where all is beetling cliff and yawning abyss, and the landscape presents nothing on every side but prodigies and terrors—the head is apt to grow giddy, and the heart to languish for the repose and security of a less elevated region.

The effect even of genuine sublimity, therefore, is impaired by the injudicious frequency of its exhibition, and the omission of those intervals and breathing-places at which the mind should be permitted to recover from its perturbation or astonishment; but where it has been summoned upon a false alarm, and disturbed in the orderly course of its attention, by an impotent attempt at elevation, the consequences are still more disastrous. There is nothing so

ridiculous (at least for a poet) as to fail in great attempts. If the reader foresaw the failure, he may receive some degree of mischievous satisfaction from its punctual occurrence; if he did not, he will be vexed and disappointed; and in both cases he will very speedily be disgusted and fatigued. It would be going too far, certainly, to maintain that our modern poets have never succeeded in their persevering endeavours at elevation and emphasis; but it is a melancholy fact that their successes bear but a small proportion to their miscarriages; and that the reader who has been promised an energetic sentiment, or sublime allusion, must often be contented with a very miserable substitute. Of the many contrivances they employ to give the appearance of uncommon force and animation to a very ordinary conception, the most usual is to wrap it up in a veil of mysterious and unintelligible language, which flows past with so much solemnity, that it is difficult to believe it conveys nothing of any value. Another device for improving the effect of a cold idea, is, to embody it in a verse of unusual harshness and asperity. Compound words, too, of a portentous sound and conformation, are very useful in giving an air of energy and originality; and a few lines of scripture, written out into verse from the original prose, have been found to have a very happy effect upon those readers to whom they have the recommendation of novelty.

The qualities of style and imagery, however, form but a small part of the characteristics by which a

literary faction is to be distinguished. The subject and object of their compositions, and the principles and opinions they are calculated to support, constitute a far more important criterion, and one to which it is usually altogether as easy to refer. Some poets are sufficiently described as the flatterers of greatness and power, and others as the champions of independence. One set of writers is known by its antipathy to decency and religion; another, by its methodistical cant and intolerance. Our new school of poetry has a moral character also; though it may not be possible, perhaps, to delineate it quite so concisely.

A splenetic and idle discontent with the existing institutions of society, seems to be at the bottom of all their serious and peculiar sentiments. Instead of contemplating the wonders and the pleasures which civilisation has created for mankind, they are perpetually brooding over the disorders by which its progress has been attended. They are filled with horror and compassion at the sight of poor men spending their blood in the quarrels of princes, and brutifying their sublime capabilities in the drudgery of unremitting labour. For all sorts of vice and profligacy in the lower orders of society, they have the same virtuous horror, and the same tender compassion. While the existence of these offences overpowers them with grief and confusion, they never permit themselves to feel the smallest indignation or dislike towards the offenders. The present vicious constitution of society alone is responsible for all these enormities; the poor sinners are but the helpless victims or instruments of

its disorders, and could not possibly have avoided the errors into which they have been betrayed. Though they can bear with crimes, therefore, they cannot reconcile themselves to punishments; and have an unconquerable antipathy to prisons, gibbets, and houses of correction, as engines of oppression, and instruments of atrocious injustice. While the plea of moral necessity is thus artfully brought forward to convert all the excesses of the poor into innocent misfortunes, no sort of indulgence is shown to the offences of the powerful and rich. Their oppressions, and seductions, and debaucheries are the theme of many an angry verse; and the indignation and abhorrence of the reader is relentlessly conjured up against those perturbators of society and scourges of mankind.

It is not easy to say whether the fundamental absurdity of this doctrine, or the partiality of its application, be entitled to the severest reprehension. If men are driven to commit crimes, through a certain moral necessity, other men are compelled, by a similar necessity, to hate and despise them for their commission. The indignation of the sufferer is at least as natural as the guilt of him who makes him suffer; and the good order of society would probably be as well preserved, if our sympathies were sometimes called forth in behalf of the former. At all events, the same apology ought certainly to be admitted for the wealthy, as for the needy offender. They are subject alike to the overruling influence of necessity, and equally affected by the miserable condition of society.

If it be natural for a poor man to murder and rob, in order to make himself comfortable, it is no less natural for a rich man to gormandise and domineer, in order to have the full use of his riches. Wealth is just as valid an excuse for the one class of vices, as indigence is for the other. There are many other peculiarities of false sentiment in the productions of this class of writers, that are sufficiently deserving of commemoration. But we have already exceeded our limits in giving these general indications of their character, and must now hasten back to the consideration of the singular performance which has given occasion to all this discussion.

The first thing that strikes the reader of *Thalaba* is, the singular structure of the versification, which is a jumble of all the measures that are known in English poetry (and a few more), without rhyme, and without any sort of regularity in their arrangement. Blank odes have been known in this country about as long as English Sapphics and dactylics; and both have been considered, we believe, as a species of monsters, or exotics, that were not very likely to propagate, or thrive, in so unpropitious a climate. Mr. Southey, however, has made a vigorous effort for their naturalisation, and generously endangered his own reputation in their behalf. The melancholy fate of his English Sapphics, we believe, is but too generally known; and we can scarcely predict a more favourable issue to the present experiment. Every combination of different measures is apt to perplex and disturb the reader who is not familiar with it; and

we are never reconciled to a stanza of a new structure, till we have accustomed our ear to it by two or three repetitions. This is the case even where we have the assistance of rhyme to direct us in our search after regularity, and where the definite form and appearance of a stanza assures us that regularity is to be found. Where both of these are wanting, it may be imagined that our condition will be still more deplorable, and a compassionate author might even excuse us, if we were unable to distinguish this kind of verse from prose. In reading verse, in general, we are guided to the discovery of its melody by a sort of preconception of its cadence and compass, without which it might often fail to be suggested by the mere articulation of the syllables. If there be any one, whose recollection does not furnish him with evidence of this fact, he may put it to the test of experiment, by desiring any of his illiterate acquaintances to read off some of Mr. Southey's dactylics, or Sir Philip Sydney's hexameters. It is the same thing with the more unusual measures of the ancient authors. We have never known any one who fell in, at the first trial, with the proper rhythm and cadence of the *pervigilium Veneris*, or the choral lyrics of the Greek dramatists. The difficulty, however, is virtually the same, as to every new combination; and it is an unsurmountable difficulty, where such new combinations are not repeated with any degree of uniformity, but are multiplied, through the whole composition, with an unbounded licence of variation. Such, however, is confessedly the case with the work before us;

and it really seems unnecessary to make any other remark on its versification.

The author, however, entertains a different opinion of it. So far from apprehending that it may cost his readers some trouble to convince themselves that the greater part of the book is not mere prose, written out in the form of verse, he is persuaded that its melody is more obvious and perceptible than that of our vulgar measures. "One advantage," says Mr. Southey, "this metre *assuredly* possesses: the dullest reader cannot distort it into discord; he may read it, with a *prose mouth*, but its flow and fall will still be perceptible." We are afraid there are duller readers in the world than Mr. Southey is aware of. We recommend the following passages for experiment:—

"The Day of the Trial will come,
When I shall understand how profitable
It is to suffer now."

"Hodeirah groaned and closed his eyes,
As if in the night and the blindness of death
He would have hid himself."

"Blessed art thou, young man,
Blessed art thou, O Aswad, for the deed!
In the day of visitation,
In the fearful hour of judgment,
God will remember thee!"

"'It is the hour of prayer, . . .
My children, let us purify ourselves
And praise the Lord our God!'
The boy the water brought;
After the law they purified themselves,
And bent their faces to the earth in prayer."

"Azure and yellow, like the beautiful fields
Of England, when amid the growing grass
The blue-bell bends, the golden king-cup shines,
In the merry month of May!"

"But Thalaba took not the draught,
For rightly he knew had the Prophet forbidden
That beverage the mother of sins."

"The blinded multitude
Adored the Sorcerer,
And bent the knee before him,
And shouted out his praise,
'Mighty art thou, the Bestower of joy,
The Lord of Paradise!'"

"Dizzy with the deafening strokes,
In blind and interrupted course,
Poor beast, he struggles on;
And now the dogs are nigh!
How his heart pants! You see
The panting of his heart;
And tears like human tears
Roll down, along the big veins." . . .

. . . . . "they perished all,
All in that dreadful hour; but I was saved,
To remember and revenge."

"Like the flowing of a Summer gale he felt
Its ineffectual force;
His countenance was not changed,
Nor a hair of his head was singed."

"'Aye! Look and triumph!' he exclaimed,
'This is the justice of thy God!
A righteous God is he, to let
His vengeance fall upon the innocent head!
Curse thee, curse thee, Thalaba!'"

"With what a thirst of joy
He should breathe in the open gales of heaven!"

"Vain are all spells! The Destroyer
Treads the Domdaniel floor."

"Thou hast done well, my Servant!
Ask and receive thy reward!"

Mr. Southey must excuse us for doubting whether even a *poet's mouth* could turn these passages into good verse; and we are afraid the greater part of his readers will participate in our scepticism.

The subject of this poem is almost as ill-chosen as the diction, and the conduct of the fable as disorderly as the versification. The corporation of magicians that inhabit "the Domdaniel caverns, under the roots of the ocean," had discovered that a terrible *destroyer* was likely to rise up against them from the seed of Hodeirah, a worthy Arab, with eight fine children. Immediately the murder of all those innocents is resolved on, and a sturdy assassin sent with instructions to destroy the whole family (as Mr. Southey has it) "root and branch." The good man, accordingly, and seven of his children are despatched. But a cloud comes over the mother and remaining child; and the poem opens with the picture of the widow and her orphan wandering by night over the deserts of Arabia. The old lady, indeed, might as well have fallen under the dagger of the Domdanielite, for she dies, without doing anything for her child, in the end of the first book; and little Thalaba is left crying in the wilderness. Here he is picked up by a good old Arab, who

takes him home and educates him like a pious Mussulman; and he and the old man's daughter fall in love with each other, according to the invariable custom in all such cases. The magicians, in the mean time, are hunting him over the face of the whole earth; and one of them gets near enough to draw his dagger to stab him, when a providential *simoon* lays him dead on the sand. From the dead sorcerer's finger, Thalaba takes a ring, inscribed with some unintelligible characters, which he is enabled to interpret by the help of some other unintelligible characters that he finds on the forehead of a locust; and soon after takes advantage of an eclipse of the sun, to set out on his expedition against his father's murderers, whom he understands (we do not very well know how) he has been commissioned to exterminate. Though they are thus seeking him and he seeking them, it is amazing what difficulty they find in meeting; they do meet, however, every now and then, and many sore evils does the Destroyer suffer at their hands. By faith and fortitude, however, and the occasional assistance of the magic implements he strips them of, he is enabled to baffle and elude their malice, till he is conducted, at last, to the Domdaniel cavern, where he finds them assembled, and pulls down the roof of it upon their heads and his own; perishing, like Samson, in the final destruction of his enemies.

From this little sketch of the story, our readers will easily perceive, that it consists altogether of the most wild and extravagant fictions, and openly sets nature

and probability at defiance. In its action, it is not an imitation of anything, and excludes all rational criticism, as to the choice and succession of its incidents. Tales of this sort may amuse children, and interest, for a moment, by the prodigies they exhibit, and the multitude of events they bring together; but the interest expires with the novelty; and attention is frequently exhausted, even before curiosity has been gratified. The pleasure afforded by performances of this sort, is very much akin to that which may be derived from the exhibition of a harlequin farce; where, instead of just imitations of nature and human character, we are entertained with the transformation of cauliflowers and beer-barrels, the apparition of ghosts and devils, and all the other magic of the wooden sword. Those who can prefer this eternal sorcery, to the just and modest representation of human actions and passions, will probably take more delight in walking among the holly griffins, and yew sphinxes of the city gardener than in ranging among the groves and lawns which have been laid out by a hand that feared to violate nature, as much as it aspired to embellish her; and disdained the easy art of startling by novelties, and surprising by impropriety.

Supernatural beings, though easily enough raised, are known to be very troublesome in the management, and have frequently occasioned much perplexity to poets and other persons who have been rash enough to call for their assistance. It is no very easy matter to preserve consistency in the

disposal of powers, with the limits of which we are so far from being familiar; and when it is necessary to represent our spiritual persons as ignorant, or suffering, we are very apt to forget the knowledge and the powers with which we had formerly invested them. The ancient poets had several unlucky rencounters of this sort with Destiny and the other deities, and Milton himself is not a little hampered with the material and immaterial qualities of his angels. Enchanters and witches may, at first sight, appear more manageable; but Mr. Southey has had difficulty enough with them; and cannot be said, after all, to have kept his fable quite clear and intelligible. The stars had said, that the destroyer might be cut off in that hour when his father and brethren were assassinated; yet he is saved by a special interposition of heaven. Heaven itself, however, had destined him to extirpate the votaries of Eblis; and yet, long before this work is done, a special message is sent to him, declaring, that, if he chooses, the death-angel is ready to take him away instead of the sorcerer's daughter. In the beginning of the story, too, the magicians are quite at a loss where to look for him; and Abdaldar only discovers him by accident after a long search; yet, no sooner does he leave the old Arab's tent, than Lobaba comes up to him, disguised, and prepared for his destruction. The witches have also a decoy ready for him in the desert, yet, he sups with Okba's daughter, without any of the sorcerers being aware of it, and afterwards proceeds to consult the simorg without meeting with any obstacle or

molestation. The simoon kills Abdaldar too, in spite of that ring which afterwards protects Thalaba from lightning, and violence, and magic. The Destroyer's arrow then falls blunted from Lobaba's breast, who is knocked down, however, by a shower of sand of his own raising; and this same arrow, which could make no impression on the sorcerer, kills the magic bird of Aloadin, and pierces the rebellious *spirit* that guarded the Domdaniel door. The whole infernal band indeed, is very feebly and heavily pourtrayed. They are a set of stupid, undignified, miserable wretches, quarrelling with each other, and trembling in the prospect of inevitable destruction. None of them even appears to have obtained the price of their self-sacrifice in worldly honours and advancement, except Moharcb; and he, though assured by destiny that there was one death-blow appointed for him and Thalaba, is yet represented, in the concluding scene, as engaged with him in furious combat, and aiming many a deadly blow at that life on which his own was dependent. If the innocent characters in this poem were not delineated with more truth and feeling, the notoriety of the author would scarcely have induced us to bestow so much time on its examination.

Though the tissue of adventures through which Thalaba is conducted in the course of this production, be sufficiently various and extraordinary, we must not set down any part of the incidents to the credit of the author's invention. He has taken great pains, indeed, to guard against such a supposition; and has been as scrupulously correct in the citation of his

authorities as if he were the compiler of a true history, and thought his reputation would be ruined by the imputation of a single fiction. There is not a prodigy, accordingly, or a description, for which he does not fairly produce his vouchers, and generally lays before his readers the whole original passage from which his imitation has been taken. In this way it turns out, that the book is entirely composed of scraps, borrowed from the Oriental tale books, and travels into the Mahometan countries, seasoned up for the English reader with some fragments of our own ballads, and shreds of our older sermons. The composition and harmony of the work, accordingly, is much like the pattern of that patchwork drapery that is sometimes to be met with in the mansions of the industrious, where a blue tree overshadows a shell-fish, and a gigantic butterfly seems ready to swallow up Palemon and Lavinia. The author has the merit merely of cutting out each of his figures from the piece where its inventor had placed it, and stitching them down together in these judicious combinations.

It is impossible to peruse this poem, with the notes, without feeling that it is the fruit of much reading, undertaken for the express purpose of fabricating some such performance. The author has set out with a resolution to make an Oriental story, and a determination to find the materials of it in the books to which he had access. Every incident, therefore, and description, every superstitious usage, or singular tradition, that appeared to him susceptible of poetical

embellishment, or capable of picturesque representation, he has set down for this purpose, and adopted such a fable and plan of composition, as might enable him to work up all his materials, and interweave every one of his quotations without any *extraordinary* violation of unity or order. When he had filled his commonplace book, he began to write; and his poem is little else than his commonplace book versified.

It may easily be imagined that a poem constructed upon such a plan must be full of cumbrous and misplaced description, and overloaded with a crowd of incidents equally unmeaning and ill assorted. The tedious account of the palace of Shedad in the first book; the description of the Summer and Winter occupations of the Arabs in the third; the ill-told story of Haruth and Maruth; the greater part of the occurrences in the island of Moharcb; the paradise of Aloadin, etc., etc., are all instances of disproportioned and injudicious ornaments, which never could have presented themselves to an author who wrote from the suggestion of his own fancy; and have evidently been introduced, from the author's unwillingness to relinquish the corresponding passages in D'Herbelot, Sale, Volney, etc., which appeared to him to have great capabilities for poetry.

. . . . . .

There is some very fine poetry in the two concluding books, from which we would willingly make some extracts, if we had not already extended this article to an unusual length, and given such a specimen of the merits and defects of this performance as will

probably be sufficient to determine the judgment of our readers.

All the productions of this author, it appears to us, bear very distinctly the impressions of an amiable mind, a cultivated fancy, and a perverted taste. His genius seems naturally to delight in the representation of domestic virtues and pleasures, and the brilliant delineation of external nature. In both these departments, he is frequently very successful; but he seems to want vigour for the loftier flights of poetry. He is often puerile, diffuse, and artificial, and seems to have but little acquaintance with those chaster and severer graces, by whom the epic muse would be most suitably attended. His faults are always aggravated, and often created, by his partiality for the peculiar manner of that new school of poetry, of which he is a faithful disciple, and to the glory of which he has sacrificed greater talents and acquisitions than can be boasted of by any of his associates.

FRANCIS JEFFREY.

The Edinburgh Review, January 1808.

HOURS OF IDLENESS.

A Series of Poems, Original and Translated. By GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON, a Minor.

8vo, 200 *pp. Newark*, 1807.

The poesy of this young lord belongs to the class which neither gods nor men are said to permit. Indeed, we do not recollect to have seen a quantity of verse with so few deviations in either direction, from that exact standard. His effusions are spread over a dead flat, and can no more get above or below the level, than if they were so much stagnant water. As an extenuation of this offence, the noble author is peculiarly forward in pleading minority. We have it in the title-page, and on the very back of the volume; it follows his name like a favourite part of his *style*. Much stress is laid upon it in the preface, and the poems are connected with this general statement of his case, by particular dates substantiating the age at which each was written. Now the law upon the point of minority, we hold to be perfectly clear. It is a plea available only to the defendant; no plaintiff can offer it as a supplementary ground of action.

Thus, if any suit could be brought against Lord Byron, for the purpose of compelling him to put into court a certain quantity of poetry; and if judgment were given against him; it is highly probable that an exception would be taken, were he to deliver *for poetry*, the contents of this volume. To this he might plead *minority;* but as he now makes voluntary tender of the article, he hath no right to sue, on that ground, for the price in good current praise, should the goods be unmarketable. This is our view of the law on the point, and, we dare to say, so will it be ruled. Perhaps, however, in reality, all that he tells us about his youth is rather with a view to increase our wonder, than to soften our censures. He possibly means to say, "See how a minor can write! This poem was actually composed by a young man of eighteen, and this by one of only sixteen!"—But alas, we all remember the poetry of Cowley at ten, and Pope at twelve; and so far from hearing, with any degree of surprise, that very poor verses were written by a youth from his leaving school to his leaving college, inclusive, we really believe this to be the most common of all occurrences; that it happens in the life of nine men in ten who are educated in England; and that the tenth man writes better verse than Lord Byron.

His other plea of privilege, our author rather brings forward in order to wave it. He certainly, however, does allude frequently to his family and ancestors—sometimes in poetry, sometimes in notes; and while giving up his claim on the score of rank, he takes

care to remember us of Dr. Johnson's saying, that when a nobleman appears as an author, his merit should be handsomely acknowledged. In truth, it is this consideration only, that induces us to give Lord Byron's poems a place in our review, beside our desire to counsel him, that he do forthwith abandon poetry, and turn his talents, which are considerable, and his opportunities, which are great, to better account.

With this view we must beg leave seriously to assure him, that the mere rhyming of the final syllable, even when accompanied by the presence of a certain number of feet—nay, although (which does not always happen) those feet should scan regularly, and have been all counted accurately upon the fingers —is not the whole art of poetry. We would entreat him to believe that a certain portion of liveliness, somewhat of fancy, is necessary to constitute a poem; and that a poem in the present day, to be read, must contain at least one thought, either in a little degree different from the ideas of former writers, or differently expressed. We put it to his candour, whether there is anything so deserving the name of poetry in verses like the following, written in 1806, and whether, if a youth of eighteen could say anything so uninteresting to his ancestors, a youth of nineteen should publish it.

"Shades of heroes, farewell! Your descendant, departing
From the seat of his ancestors, bids you, adieu!
Abroad, or at home, your remembrance imparting
New courage, he'll think upon glory, and you.

Though a tear dim his eye, at this sad separation,
'Tis nature, not fear, that excites his regret ;
Far distant he goes, with the same emulation ;
The fame of his fathers he ne'er can forget.

That fame, and that memory, still will he cherish,
He vows that he ne'er will disgrace your renown ;
Like you will he live, or like you will he perish ;
When decay'd, may he mingle his dust with your own."

Now we positively do assert, that there is nothing better than these stanzas in the whole compass of the noble minor's volume.

Lord Byron should also have a care of attempting what the greatest poets have done before him, for comparisons (as he must have had occasion to see at his writing-master's) are odious. Gray's *Ode on Eton College* should really have kept out the ten hobbling stanzas "on a distant view of the village and school of Harrow."

"Where fancy, yet, joys to retrace the resemblance,
Of comrades, in friendship and mischief allied ;
How welcome to me, your ne'er fading remembrance,
Which rests in the bosom, though hope is deny'd !"

In like manner the exquisite lines of Mr. Rogers, *On a Tear*, might have warned the noble author off those premises, and spared us a whole dozen such stanzas as the following :—

"Mild Charity's glow,
To us mortals below,
Shows the soul from barbarity clear ;
Compassion will melt,
Where this virtue is felt,
And its dew is diffus'd in a Tear.

The man doom'd to sail,
With the blast of the gale,
Through billows Atlantic to steer,
As he bends o'er the wave,
Which may soon be his grave,
The green sparkles bright with a Tear."

And so of instances in which former poets had failed. Thus, we do not think Lord Byron was made for translating, during his nonage, *Adrian's Address to his Soul*, when Pope succeeded so indifferently in the attempt. If our readers, however, are of another opinion they may look at it.

"Ah! Gentle, fleeting, wav'ring sprite,
Friend and associate of this clay!
To what unknown region borne,
Wilt thou now wing thy distant flight?
No more, with wonted humour gay,
But pallid, cheerless, and forlorn."

However, be this as it may, we fear his translations and imitations are great favourites with Lord Byron. We have them of all kinds, from Anacreon to Ossian; and, viewing them as school exercises, they may pass. Only, why print them after they have had their day and served their turn? And why call the thing in p. 79 a translation, where *two* words (θέλω λέγειν) of the original are expanded into four lines, and the other thing in p. 81, where μεσονύκτιὸς ποθ' ὁ παῖς is rendered by means of six hobbling verses? As to his Ossianic poesy, we are not very good judges, being, in truth, so moderately skilled in that species of composition that we should, in all probability, be

criticising some bit of the genuine Macpherson itself, were we to express our opinion of Lord Byron's rhapsodies. *If*, then, the following beginning of a *Song of Bards* is by his lordship, we venture to object to it, as far as we can comprehend it. "What form rises on the roar of clouds, whose dark ghost gleams on the red stream of tempests? His voice rolls on the thunder; 'tis Orla, the brown chief of Otilhona. He was," etc. After detaining this "brown chief" some time, the bards conclude by giving him their advice to "raise his fair locks;" then to "spread them on the arch of the rainbow;" and "to smile through the tears of the storm." Of this kind of thing there are no less than *nine* pages; and we can so far venture an opinion in their favour, that they look very like Macpherson; and we are positive they are pretty nearly as stupid and tiresome.

It is a sort of privilege of poets to be egotists; but they should "use it as not abusing it;" and particularly one who piques himself (though indeed at the ripe age of nineteen) of being "an infant bard" —("The artless Helicon I boast is youth")—should either not know, or should seem not to know, so much about his own ancestry. Besides a poem above cited on the family seat of the Byrons, we have another of eleven pages on the selfsame subject, introduced with an apology, "he certainly had no intention of inserting it," but really "the particular request of some friends," etc., etc. It concludes with five stanzas on himself, "the last and youngest of a noble line." There is a good deal also about his maternal ancestors in a

poem on Lachin-y-gair, a mountain where he spent part of his youth, and might have learnt that *pibroch* is not a bagpipe, any more than duet means a fiddle.

As the author has dedicated so large a part of his volume to immortalise his employments at school and college, we cannot possibly dismiss it without presenting the reader with a specimen of these ingenious effusions. In an ode with a Greek motto, called *Granta*, we have the following stanzas :—

"There, in apartments small and damp,
The candidate for college prizes,
Sits poring by the midnight lamp,
Goes late to bed, yet early rises.

Who reads false quantities in Sele,
Or puzzles o'er the deep triangle ;
Depriv'd of many a wholesome meal,
In barbarous Latin doom'd to wrangle.

Renouncing every pleasing page,
From authors of historic use ;
Preferring to the lettered sage,
The square of the hypothenuse.

Still harmless are these occupations,
That hurt none but the hapless student,
Compar'd with other recreations
Which bring together the imprudent."

We are sorry to hear so bad an account of the college psalmody as is contained in the following Attic stanzas :—

"Our choir would scarcely be excus'd
Even as a band of raw beginners;
All mercy, now, must be refus'd
To such a set of croaking sinners.

If David, when his toils were ended,
Had heard these blockheads sing before him,
To us, his psalms had ne'er descended,
In furious mood he would have tore 'em."

But whatever judgment may be passed on the poems of this noble minor, it seems we must take them as we find them, and be content, for they are the last we shall ever have from him. He is at best, he says, but an intruder into the groves of Parnassus; he never lived in a garret, like thorough-bred poets; and "though he once roved a careless mountaineer in the Highlands of Scotland," he has not of late enjoyed this advantage. Moreover, he expects no profit from his publication; and whether it succeeds or not, "it is highly improbable, from his situation and pursuits hereafter," that he should again condescend to become an author. Therefore, let us take what we get and be thankful. What right have we poor devils to be nice? We are well off to have got so much from a man of this lord's station, who does not live in a garret, but "has the sway" of Newstead Abbey. Again, we say, let us be thankful; and, with honest Sancho, bid God bless the giver, nor look the gift-horse in the mouth.

LORD BROUGHAM.

The Edinburgh Review, January 1809.

RELIQUES OF ROBERT BURNS.

Consisting chiefly of Original Letters, Poems, and Critical Observations on Scottish Songs. Collected and published by R. H. Cromek.

8vo, 450 *pp. London*, 1808.

Burns is certainly by far the greatest of our poetical prodigies—from Stephen Duck down to Thomas Dermody. *They* are forgotten already, or only remembered for derision. But the name of Burns, if we are not mistaken, has not yet "gathered all its fame," and will endure long after those circumstances are forgotten, which contributed to its first notoriety. So much indeed are we impressed with a sense of his merits that we cannot help thinking it a derogation from them to consider him as a prodigy at all, and are convinced that he will never be rightly estimated as a poet till that vulgar wonder be entirely repressed which was raised on his having been a ploughman. It is true, no doubt, that he was born in an humble station, and that much of his early life was devoted to severe labour, and to the society of his fellow-labourers. But he was not

himself either uneducated or illiterate, and was placed perhaps in a situation more favourable to the development of great poetical talents, than any other which could have been assigned him. He was taught, at a very early age, to read and write, and soon after acquired a competent knowledge of French, together with the elements of Latin and Geometry. His taste for reading was encouraged by his parents and many of his associates; and, before he had ever composed a single stanza, he was not only familiar with many prose writers, but far more intimately acquainted with Pope, Shakespeare, and Thomson, than nine-tenths of the youth that leave school for the university. These authors, indeed, with some old collections of songs, and the lives of Hannibal and of Sir William Wallace, were his habitual study from the first days of his childhood; and, co-operating with the solitude of his rural occupations, were sufficient to rouse his ardent and ambitious mind to the love and the practice of poetry. He had as much scholarship, we imagine, as Shakespeare, and far better models to form his ear to harmony, and train his fancy to graceful invention.

We ventured on a former occasion[1] to say something of the effects of regular education, and of the general diffusion of literature, in repressing the vigour and originality of all kinds of mental exertion. That speculation was perhaps carried somewhat too far; but if the paradox have proof anywhere, it is in its application to poetry. Among well-educated

[1] Vol. viii. p. 329.

people the standard writers of this description are at once so venerated and so familiar, that it is thought equally impossible to rival them, and to write verses without attempting it. If there be one degree of fame which excites emulation, there is another which leads to despair; nor can we conceive any one less likely to add one to the short list of original poets, than a young man of fine fancy and delicate taste, who has acquired a high relish for poetry, by perusing the most celebrated writers, and conversing with the most intelligent judges. The head of such a person is filled, of course, with all the splendid passages of antient and modern authors, and with all the fine and fastidious remarks which have been made even on these passages. When he turns his eyes, therefore, on his own conceptions, they can scarcely fail to appear rude and contemptible. He is perpetually haunted and depressed by the ideal presence of those great masters and their exacting critics. He is aware to what comparisons his productions will be subjected among his old friends and associates; and recollects the derision with which so many rash adventurers have been chased back to their obscurity. Thus the merit of his great predecessors chills, instead of encouraging his ardour; and the illustrious names which have already reached to the summit of excellence, act like the tall and spreading trees of the forest, which overshadow and strangle the saplings which have struck root in the soil below, and afford shelter to nothing but creepers and parasites.

There is, no doubt, in some few individuals "that strong divinity of soul,"—that decided and irresistible vocation to glory, which, in spite of all these obstructions, calls out, perhaps once or twice in a century, a bold and original poet from the herd of scholars and academical literati. But the natural tendency of their studies, and by far the most common operation, is to repress originality and discourage enterprise; and either to change those whom nature meant for poets into mere readers of poetry, or to bring them out in the form of witty parodists, or ingenious imitators. Independent of the reasons which have been already suggested, it will perhaps be found too that necessity is the mother of invention in this as well as in the more vulgar arts; or, at least, that inventive genius will frequently slumber in inaction, where preceding ingenuity has in part supplied the wants of the owner. A solitary and uninstructed man, with lively feelings and an inflammable imagination, will be easily led to exercise those gifts, and to occupy and relieve his mind in poetical composition; but if his education, his reading and his society supply him with an abundant store of images and emotions, he will probably think but little of these internal resources, and feed his mind contentedly with what has been provided by the industry of others.

To say nothing, therefore, of the distractions and the dissipation of mind that belong to the commerce of the world, nor of the cares of minute accuracy and high finishing which are imposed on the professed

scholar, there seem to be deeper reasons for the separation of originality and accomplishment, and for the partiality which has led poetry to choose almost all her favourites among the recluse and uninstructed. A youth of quick parts, in short, and creative fancy—with just so much reading as to guide his ambition, and rough hew his notions of excellence—if his lot be thrown in humble retirement, where he has no reputation to lose, and where he can easily hope to excel all that he sees around him, is much more likely, we think, to give himself up to poetry, and to train himself to habits of invention, than if he had been encumbered by the pretended helps of extended study and literary society.

If these observations should fail to strike of themselves, they may perhaps derive additional weight from considering the very remarkable fact, that almost all the great poets of every country have appeared in an early stage of their history, and in a period comparatively rude and unlettered. Homer went forth like the morning star before the dawn of literature in Greece; and almost all the great and sublime poets of modern Europe are already between two and three hundred years old. Since that time, although books and readers, and opportunities of reading, are multiplied a thousandfold, we have improved chiefly in point and terseness of expression, in the art of raillery, and in clearness and simplicity of thought. Force, richness, and variety of invention are now at least as rare as ever. But the literature and refinement of the age does not exist at all for a

rustic and illiterate individual; and, consequently, the present time is to him what the rude times of old were to the vigorous writers which adorned them.

But though, for these and for other reasons, we can see no propriety in regarding the poetry of Burns chiefly as the wonderful work of a peasant, and thus admiring it much in the same way as if it had been written with his toes; yet there are peculiarities in his works which remind us of the lowness of his origin, and faults for which the defects of his education afford an obvious cause, if not a legitimate apology. In forming a correct estimate of these works, it is necessary to take into account those peculiarities.

The first is, the undisciplined harshness and acrimony of his invective. The great boast of polished life is the delicacy and even the generosity of its hostility, that quality which is still the characteristic as it is the denomination of a gentleman,—that principle which forbids us to attack the defenceless, to strike the fallen, or to mangle the slain,—and enjoins us, in forging the shafts of satire, to increase the polish exactly as we add to their keenness or their weight. For this, as well as for other things, we are indebted to chivalry, and of this Burns had none. His ingenious and amiable biographer has spoken repeatedly in praise of his talents for satire,—we think with a most unhappy partiality. His epigrams and lampoons appear to us, one and all, unworthy of him—offensive from their extreme coarseness and violence, and contemptible from their want of wit and brilliancy. They seem to have been written, not out of playful malice

or virtuous indignation, but out of fierce and ungovernable anger. His whole raillery consists in railing; and his satirical vein displays itself chiefly in calling names and in swearing. We say this mainly with a reference to his personalities. In many of his more general representations of life and manners there is no doubt much that may be called satirical, mixed up with admirable humour, and description of inimitable vivacity.

There is a similar want of polish, or at least of respectfulness, in the general tone of his gallantry. He has written with more passion, perhaps, and more variety of natural feeling, on the subject of love, than any other poet whatsoever,—but with a fervour that is sometimes indelicate, and seldom accommodated to the timidity and "sweet austere composure" of women of refinement. He has expressed admirably the feelings of an enamoured peasant, who, however refined or eloquent he may be, always approaches his mistress on a footing of equality; but has never caught that tone of chivalrous gallantry which uniformly abases itself in the presence of the object of its devotion. Accordingly, instead of suing for a smile, or melting in a tear, his muse deals in nothing but locked embraces and midnight rencontres; and, even in his complimentary effusions to ladies of the highest rank, is for straining them to the bosom of her impetuous votary. It is easy, accordingly, to see from his correspondence that many of his female patronesses shrunk from the vehement familiarity of his admiration; and there are even some traits in the

volumes before us, from which we can gather that he resented the shyness and estrangement to which these feelings gave rise, with at least as little chivalry as he had shown in producing them.

But the leading vice in Burns's character, and the cardinal deformity indeed of all his productions, was his contempt, or affectation of contempt, for prudence, decency, and regularity; and his admiration of thoughtlessness, oddity, and vehement sensibility—his belief, in short, in *the dispensing power* of genius and social feeling, in all matters of morality and common sense. This is the very slang of the worst German plays, and the lowest of our town-made novels; nor can anything be more lamentable than that it should have found a patron in such a man as Burns, and communicated to a great part of his productions a character of immorality, at once contemptible and hateful. It is but too true, that men of the highest genius have frequently been hurried by their passions into a violation of prudence and duty; and there is something generous at least in the apology which their admirers may make for them, on the score of their keener feelings and habitual want of reflection. But this apology, which is quite unsatisfactory in the mouth of another, becomes an insult and an absurdity whenever it proceeds from their own. A man may say of his friend that he is a noble-hearted fellow—too generous to be just, and with too much spirit to be always prudent and regular. But he cannot be allowed to say even this of himself; and still less to represent himself as a

hair-brained sentimental soul, constantly carried away by fine fancies and visions of love and philanthropy, and born to confound and despise the cold-blooded sons of prudence and sobriety. This apology evidently destroys itself; for it shows that conduct to be the result of deliberate system, which it affects at the same time to justify as the fruit of mere thoughtlessness and casual impulse. Such protestations, therefore, will always be treated, as they deserve, not only with contempt, but with incredulity; and their magnanimous authors set down as determined profligates; who seek to disguise their selfishness under a name somewhat less revolting. That profligacy is almost always selfishness, and that the excuse of impetuous feeling can hardly ever be justly pleaded for those who neglect the ordinary duties of life, must be apparent, we think, even to the least reflecting of those sons of fancy and song. It requires no habit of deep thinking, nor anything more, indeed, than the information of an honest heart, to perceive that it is cruel and base to spend, in vain superfluities, that money which belongs of right to the pale industrious tradesman and his famishing infants; or that it is a vile prostitution of language to talk of that man's generosity or goodness of heart, who sits raving about friendship and philanthropy in a tavern, while his wife's heart is breaking at her cheerless fireside, and his children pining in solitary poverty.

This pitiful cant of careless feeling and eccentric genius, accordingly, has never found much favour in the eyes of English sense and morality. The most

signal effect which it ever produced was on the muddy brains of some German youths, who left college in a body to rob on the highway, because Schiller had represented the captain of a gang as so very noble a creature. But in this country, we believe, a predilection for that honourable profession must have preceded this admiration of the character. The style we have been speaking of, accordingly, is now the heroics only of the hulks and the house of corrections; and has no chance, we suppose, of being greatly admired, except in the farewell speech of a young gentleman preparing for Botany Bay.

It is humiliating to think how deeply Burns has fallen into this debasing error. He is perpetually making a parade of his thoughtlessness, inflammability, and imprudence, and talking with much complacency and exultation of the offence he has occasioned to the sober and correct part of mankind. This odious slang infects almost all his prose, and a very great proportion of his poetry; and is, we are persuaded, the chief, if not the only source of the disgust with which, in spite of his genius, we know that he is regarded by many very competent and liberal judges. His apology, too, we are willing to believe, is to be found in the original lowness of his situation, and the slightness of his acquaintance with the world. With his talents and powers of observation, he could not have seen *much* of the beings who echoed this raving, without feeling for them that distrust and contempt which would have made him blush to think he had ever stretched over them the protecting shield of his genius.

Akin to this most lamentable trait of vulgarity, and indeed in some measure arising out of it, is that perpetual boast of his own independence, which is obtruded upon the readers of Burns in almost every page of his writings. The sentiment itself is noble, and it is often finely expressed;—but a gentleman would only have expressed it when he was insulted or provoked; and would never have made it a spontaneous theme to those friends in whose estimation he felt that his honour stood clear. It is mixed up too in Burns with too fierce a tone of defiance; and indicates rather the pride of a sturdy peasant, than the colour and natural elevation of a generous mind.

The last of the symptoms of rusticity which we think it necessary to notice in the works of this extraordinary man, is that frequent mistake of mere exaggeration and violence, for force and sublimity, which has defaced so much of his prose composition, and given an air of heaviness and labour to a good deal of his serious poetry. The truth is, that his *forte* was in humour and in pathos—or rather in tenderness of feeling; and that he has very seldom succeeded, either where mere wit and sprightliness, or where great energy and weight of sentiment were requisite. He had evidently a very false and crude notion of what constituted *strength* of writing; and, instead of that simple and brief directness which stamps the character of vigour upon every syllable, has generally had recourse to a mere accumulation of hyperbolical expressions, which encumber the diction instead of

exalting it, and show the determination to be impressive, without the power of executing it. This error also we are inclined to ascribe entirely to the defects of his education. The value of simplicity in the expression of passion is a lesson, we believe, of nature and of genius ;—but its importance in mere grave and impressive writing is one of the latest discoveries of rhetorical experience.

With the allowances and exceptions we have now stated, we think Burns entitled to the rank of a great and original genius. He has in all his compositions great force of conception, and great spirit and animation in its expression. He has taken a large range through the region of Fancy, and naturalised himself in almost all her climates. He has great humour—great powers of description—great pathos—and great discrimination of character. Almost everything that he says has spirit and originality, and everything that he says well, is characterised by a charming facility, which gives grace even to occasional rudeness, and communicates to the reader a delightful sympathy with the spontaneous soaring and conscious inspiration of the poet.

Considering the reception which these works have met with from the public, and the long period during which the greater part of them have been in their possession, it may appear superfluous to say anything as to their characteristic or peculiar merit. Though the ultimate judgment of the public, however, be always sound, or at least decisive, as to its general result, it is not always very apparent upon what

grounds it has proceeded; nor in consequence of what, or in spite of what, it has been obtained. In Burns's works there is much to censure, as well as much to praise; and as time has not yet separated his ore from its dross, it may be worth while to state, in a very general way, what we presume to anticipate as the result of this separation. Without pretending to enter at all into the comparative merit of particular passages, we may venture to lay it down as our opinion—that his poetry is far superior to his prose; that his Scottish compositions are greatly to be preferred to his English ones; and that his songs will probably outlive all his other productions. A very few remarks on each of these subjects will comprehend almost all that we have to say of the volumes now before us.

The prose works of Burns consist almost entirely of his letters. They bear, as well as his poetry, the seal and the impress of his genius; but they contain much more bad taste, and are written with far more apparent labour. His poetry was almost all written primarily from feeling, and only secondarily from ambition. His letters seem to have been nearly all composed as exercises, and for display. There are few of them written with simplicity or plainness; and though natural enough as to the sentiment, they are generally very strained and elaborate in the expression. A very great proportion of them, too, relate neither to facts nor feelings peculiarly connected with the author or his correspondent, but are made up of general declamation, moral reflections, and vague

discussions—all evidently composed for the sake of effect, and frequently introduced with long complaints of having nothing to say, and of the necessity and difficulty of letter-writing.

By far the best of these compositions are such as we should consider as exceptions from this general character—such as contain some specific information as to himself, or are suggested by events or observations directly applicable to his correspondent.

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Before proceeding to take any particular notice of his poetical compositions, we must apprise our Southern readers, that all his best pieces are written in Scotch; and that it is impossible for them to form any adequate judgment of their merits without a pretty long residence among those who still use that language. To be able to translate the words, is but a small part of the knowledge that is necessary. The whole genius and idiom of the language must be familiar; and the characters, and habits, and associations of those who speak it. We beg leave, too, in passing, to observe, that this Scotch is not to be considered as a provincial dialect—the vehicle only of rustic vulgarity and rude local humour. It is the language of a whole country—long an independent kingdom, and still separate in laws, character, and manners. It is by no means peculiar to the vulgar, but is the common speech of the whole nation in early life—and with many of its most exalted and accomplished individuals throughout their whole existence; and if it be true that, in later times, it has been, in

some measure, laid aside by the more ambitious and aspiring of the present generation, it is still recollected, even by them, as the familiar language of their childhood, and of those who were the earliest objects of their love and veneration. It is connected, in their imagination, not only with that olden time which is uniformly conceived as more pure, lofty, and simple than the present, but also with all the soft and bright colours of remembered childhood and domestic affection. All its phrases conjure up images of school-day innocence, and sports, and friendships, which have no pattern in succeeding years. Add to all this, that it is the language of a great body of poetry, with which almost all Scotchmen are familiar, and in particular of a great multitude of songs, written with more tenderness, nature, and feeling than any other lyric compositions that are extant; and we may perhaps be allowed to say that the Scotch is, in reality, a highly poetical language, and that it is an ignorant, as well as an illiberal prejudice, which would seek to confound it with the barbarous dialects of Yorkshire or Devon. In composing his Scottish poems, therefore, Burns did not make an instinctive and necessary use of the only dialect he could employ. The last letter which we have quoted proves that, before he had penned a single couplet, he could write in the dialect of England with far greater purity and propriety than nine-tenths of those who are called well educated in that country. He wrote in Scotch because the writings which he most aspired to imitate were composed in that language; and it is evident,

from the variations preserved by Dr. Currie, that he took much greater pains with the beauty and purity of his expressions in Scotch than in English, and, every one who understands both must admit, with infinitely better success.

But though we have ventured to say thus much in praise of the Scottish poetry of Burns, we cannot presume to lay many specimens of it before our readers; and in the few extracts we may be tempted to make from the volumes before us, shall be guided more by a desire to exhibit what may be intelligible to all our readers, than by a feeling of what is in itself of the highest excellence.

We have said that Burns is almost equally distinguished for his tenderness and his humour:—we might have added, for a faculty of combining them both in the same subject, not altogether without parallel in the older poets and ballad makers, but already singular, we think, among modern critics. The passages of pure humour are entirely Scottish, and untranslatable. They consist in the most picturesque representations of life and manners, enlivened, and even exalted, by traits of exquisite sagacity, and unexpected reflection. His tenderness is of two sorts: that which is combined with circumstances and characters of humble, and sometimes ludicrous simplicity; and that which is produced by gloomy and distressful impressions acting on a mind of keen sensibility. The passages which belong to the former description are, we think, the most exquisite and original, and, in our estimation, indicate

the greatest and most amiable turn of genius; both as being accompanied by fine and feeling pictures of humble life, and as requiring that delicacy as well as justness of conception, by which alone the fastidiousness of an ordinary reader can be reconciled to such representations. The exquisite description of *The Cottar's Saturday Night* affords, perhaps, the finest example of this sort of pathetic. Its whole beauty cannot indeed be discerned but by those whom experience has enabled to judge of the admirable fidelity and completedness of the picture.

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The finest examples, however, of this simple and unpretending tenderness is to be found in those songs which are likely to transmit the name of Burns to all future generations. He found this delightful trait in the old Scottish ballads which he took for his model, and upon which he has improved with a felicity and delicacy of imitation altogether unrivalled in the history of literature. Sometimes it is the brief and simple pathos of the genuine old ballad; as—

> "But I look to the West when I lie down to rest,
> That happy my dreams and my slumbers may be;
> For far in the West lives he I love best,
> The lad that is dear to my baby and me."

Or, as in this other specimen—

> "Drumossie moor, Drumossie day,
> A waefu' day it was to me;
> For there I lost my father dear,
> My father dear, and brethren three.

Their winding sheet the bluidy clay,
Their graves are growing green to see;
And by them lies the dearest lad
That ever blest a woman's e'e!
Now wae to thee, thou cruel lord,
A bluidy man I trow thou be;
For mony a heart thou hast made sair,
That ne'er did wrong to thine or thee."

Sometimes it is animated with airy narrative, and adorned with images of the utmost elegance and beauty. As a specimen taken at random, we insert the following stanzas:—

"And aye she wrought her mammie's wark,
And aye she sang sae merrilie;
The blythest bird upon the bush
Had ne'er a lighter heart than she.

But hawks will rob the tender joys
That bless the little lintwhite's nest;
And frost will blight the fairest flowers,
And love will break the soundest rest.

Young Robie was the brawest lad,
The flower and pride of a' the glen;
And he had owsen, sheep, and kye,
And wanton naigies nine or ten.

He gaed wi' Jeanie to the tryste,
He danced wi' Jeanie on the down;
And lang ere witless Jeanie wist,
Her heart was tint, her peace was stown.

As in the bosom o' the stream
The moonbeam dwells at dewy e'en;
So trembling, pure, was infant love
Within the breast o' bonnie Jean."

Sometimes again, it is plaintive and mournful—in the same strain of unaffected simplicity.

"O stay, sweet warbling wood-lark, stay,
Nor quit for me the trembling spray!
A hapless lover courts thy lay,
Thy soothing fond complaining.

Again, again that tender part,
That I may catch thy melting art;
For surely that wad touch her heart,
Wha kills me wi' disdaining.

Say, was thy little mate unkind,
And heard thee as the careless wind?
Oh, nocht but love and sorrow join'd
Sic notes o' woe would wauken.

Thou tell'st o' never-ending care;
O' speechless grief, and dark despair;
For pity's sake, sweet bird, nae mair!
Or my poor heart is broken!"

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We shall conclude with two general remarks—the one national, the other critical. The first is, that it is impossible to read the productions of Burns, along with his history, without forming a higher idea of the intelligence, taste, and accomplishments of the peasantry, than most of those in the higher ranks are disposed to entertain. Without meaning to deny that he himself was endowed with rare and extraordinary gifts of genius and fancy, it is evident, from the whole details of his history, as well as from the letters of his brother, and the testimony of Mr.

Murdoch and others to the character of his father, that the whole family, and many of their associates, who have never emerged from the native obscurity of their condition, possessed talents, and taste, and intelligence, which are little suspected to lurk in those humble retreats. His epistles to brother poets, in the rank of farmers and shopkeepers in the adjoining villages—the existence of a book society and debating club among persons of that description, and many other incidental traits in his sketches of his youthful companions—all contribute to show, that not only good sense, and enlightened morality, but literature, and talents for speculation, are far more generally diffused in society than is generally imagined; and that the delights and the benefits of these generous and humanising pursuits, are by no means confined to those whom leisure and affluence have courted to their enjoyment. That much of this is peculiar to Scotland, and may be properly referred to our excellent institutions for parochial education, and to the natural sobriety and prudence of our nation, may certainly be allowed; but we have no doubt that there is a good deal of the same principle in England, and that the actual intelligence of the lower orders will be found, there also, very far to exceed the ordinary estimates of their superiors. It is pleasing to know, that the sources of rational enjoyment are so widely disseminated; and, in a free country, it is comfortable to think that so great a proportion of the people is able to appreciate the advantages of its condition, and fit to be relied on in

all emergencies where steadiness and intelligence may be required.

Our other remark is of a more limited application, and is addressed chiefly to the followers and patrons of that new school of poetry, against which we have thought it our duty to neglect no opportunity of testifying. Those gentlemen are outrageous for simplicity; and we beg leave to recommend to them the simplicity of Burns. He has copied the spoken language of passion and affection, with infinitely more fidelity than they have ever done, on all occasions which properly admitted of such adaptation; but he has not rejected the helps of elevated language and habitual associations, nor debased his composition by an affectation of babyish interjections, and all the puling expletives of an old nursery-maid's vocabulary. They may look long enough among his nervous and manly lines before they find any "Good lacks!"—"Dear hearts!"—or "As a body may say," in them; or any stuff about dancing daffodils and sister Emmelines. Let them think with what infinite contempt the powerful mind of Burns would have perused the story of Alice Fell and her duffle cloak—of Andrew Jones and the half-crown—or of Little Dan without breeches and his thievish grandfather. Let them contrast their own fantastical personages of hysterical schoolmasters and sententious leech-gatherers, with the authentic rustics of Burns's *Cottar's Saturday Night*, and his inimitable songs; and reflect on the different reception which these personifications have met with from the public.

Though they will not be reclaimed from their puny affectations by the example of their learned predecessors, they may, perhaps, submit to be admonished by a self-taught and illiterate poet, who drew from Nature far more directly than they can do, and produced something so much liker the admired copies of the masters whom they have abjured.

FRANCIS JEFFREY.

The Edinburgh Review, August 1810.

THE LADY OF THE LAKE. A POEM.

By WALTER SCOTT.

Second Edition. 8*vo*, 434 *pp.* 1810.

MR. SCOTT, though living in an age unusually prolific of original poetry, has manifestly outstripped all his competitors in the race of popularity; and stands already upon a height to which no other writer has attained in the memory of any one now alive. We doubt, indeed, whether any English poet *ever* had so many of his books sold, or so many of his verses read and admired by such a multitude of persons, in so short a time. We are credibly informed, that nearly thirty thousand copies of *The Lay* have been already disposed of in this country; and that the demand for *Marmion* and the poem now before us has been still more considerable—a circulation, we believe, altogether without example, in the case of a bulky work, not addressed to the bigotry of the mere mob, either religious or political.

A popularity so universal is a pretty sure proof of extraordinary merit—a far surer one, we readily admit, than would be afforded by any praises of ours; and, therefore, though we pretend to be privileged, in

ordinary cases, to foretell the ultimate reception of all claims on public admiration, our function may be thought to cease, where the event is already so certain and conspicuous. As it is a sore thing, however, to be deprived of our privileges on so important an occasion, we hope to be pardoned for insinuating that, even in such a case, the office of the critic may not be altogether superfluous. Though the success of the author be decisive, and likely to be permanent, it still may not be without its use to point out, in consequence of what, and in spite of what, he has succeeded; nor altogether uninstructive to trace the precise limits of the connection which, even in this dull world, indisputably subsists between success and desert, and to ascertain how far unexampled popularity implies unrivalled talent.

As it is the object of poetry to give pleasure, it seems to be a pretty safe conclusion that that poetry must be the best which gives the greatest pleasure to the greatest number of persons. Yet we must pause a little, before we give our assent to so plausible a proposition. It would not be quite correct, we fear, to say that those are invariably the best judges who are most easily pleased. The great multitude, even of the reading world, must necessarily be uninstructed and injudicious; and will frequently be found, not only to derive pleasure from what is worthless in finer eyes, but to be quite insensible to those beauties which afford the most exquisite delight to more cultivated understandings. True pathos and sublimity will indeed charm every one; but, out of this

lofty sphere, we are pretty well convinced that the poetry which appears most perfect to a very refined taste, will not turn out to be very popular poetry.

This, indeed, is saying nothing more than that the ordinary readers of poetry have not a very refined taste; and that they are often insensible to many of its highest beauties, while they still more frequently mistake its imperfections for excellence. The fact, when stated in this simple way, commonly excites neither opposition nor surprise; and yet, if it be asked, why the taste of a few individuals, who do not perceive beauty where many others perceive it, should be exclusively dignified with the name of a good taste; or why poetry, which gives pleasure to a very great number of readers, should be thought inferior to that which pleases a much smaller number, —the answer, perhaps, may not be quite so ready as might have been expected from the alacrity of our assent to the first proposition. That there is a good answer to be given, however, we entertain no doubt; and if that which we are about to offer should not appear very clear or satisfactory, we must submit to have it thought that the fault is not altogether in the subject.

In the first place, then, it should be remembered that though the taste of very good judges is necessarily the taste of a few, it is implied in their description that they are persons eminently qualified by natural sensibility, and long experience and reflection, to perceive all beauties that really exist, as well as to

settle the relative value and importance of all the different sorts of beauty—they are in that very state, in short, to which all who are in any degree capable of tasting those refined pleasures would certainly arrive, if their sensibility were increased, and their experience and reflection enlarged. It is difficult, therefore, in following out the ordinary analogies of language, to avoid considering them as in the right, and calling their taste the true and the just one, when it appears that it is such as is uniformly produced by the cultivation of those faculties upon which all our perceptions of taste so obviously depend. It is to be considered also that though it be the end of poetry to please, one of the parties whose pleasure, and whose notions of excellence will always be primarily consulted in its composition, is the poet himself, and as he must necessarily be more cultivated than the great body of his readers, the presumption is that he will always belong, comparatively speaking, to the class of good judges, and endeavour, consequently, to produce that sort of excellence which is likely to meet with *their* approbation. When authors, and those of whose suffrages authors are ambitious, thus conspire to fix upon the same standard of what is good in taste and composition, it is easy to see how it should come to bear this name in society, in preference to what might afford more pleasure to individuals of less influence. Besides all this, it is obvious that it must be infinitely more *difficult* to produce anything conformable to this exalted standard, than merely to fall in with the current of popular taste. To attain

the former object, it is necessary, for the most part, to understand thoroughly all the feelings and associations that are modified or created by cultivation—to accomplish the latter, it will often be sufficient merely to have observed the course of familiar preferences. Success, however, is rare, in proportion as it is difficult; and it is needless to say what a vast addition rarity makes to value,—or how exactly our admiration at success is proportioned to our sense of the difficulty of the undertaking.

Such seem to be the most general and immediate causes of the apparent paradox, of reckoning that which pleases the greatest number as inferior to that which pleases the few; and such the leading grounds for fixing the standard of excellence, in a question of mere feeling and gratification, by a different rule than that of the quantity of gratification produced. With regard to some of the fine arts—for the distinction between popular and actual merit obtains in them all—there are no other reasons perhaps to be assigned; and in music, for example, when we have said that it is the *authority* of those who are best qualified by nature and study, and the *difficulty* and *rarity* of the attainment, that entitles certain exquisite performances to rank higher than others that give far more general delight, we have probably said all that can be said in explanation of this mode of speaking and judging. In poetry, however, and in some other departments, this familiar, though somewhat extraordinary rule of estimation, is justified by other considerations.

As it is the cultivation of natural and perhaps

universal capacities that produces that refined taste which takes away our pleasure in vulgar excellence, so, it is to be considered, that there is an universal tendency to the propagation of such a taste; and that, in times tolerably favourable to human happiness, there is a continual progress and improvement in this, as in the other faculties of nations and large assemblies of men. The number of intelligent judges may therefore be regarded as perpetually on the increase. The inner circle, to which the poet delights chiefly to pitch his voice, is perpetually enlarging, and looking to that great futurity to which his ambition is constantly directed, it may be found that the most refined style of composition to which he can attain, will be, at the last, the most extensively and permanently popular. This holds true, we think, with regard to all the productions of art that are open to the inspection of any considerable part of the community; but with regard to poetry in particular, there is one circumstance to be attended to, that renders this conclusion peculiarly safe, and goes far indeed to reconcile the taste of the multitude with that of more cultivated judges.

As it seems difficult to conceive that mere cultivation should either absolutely create or utterly destroy any natural capacity of enjoyment, it is not easy to suppose, that the qualities which delight the uninstructed should be substantially different from those which give pleasure to the enlightened. They may be arranged according to a different scale—and certain shades and accompaniments may be more or

less indispensable; but the qualities in a poem that give most pleasure to the refined and fastidious critic are in substance, we believe, the very same that delight the most injudicious of its admirers ;—and the very wide difference which exists between their usual estimates, may be in a great degree accounted for, by considering, that the one judges absolutely, and the other relatively—that the one attends only to the intrinsic qualities of the *work*, while the other refers more immediately to the merit of the *author*. The most popular passages in popular poetry are, in fact, for the most part very beautiful and striking ; yet they are very often such passages as could never be ventured on by any writer who aimed at the praise of the judicious; and this, for the obvious reason, that they are trite and hackneyed—that they have been repeated till they have lost all grace and propriety —and instead of exalting the imagination with the impression of original genius or creative fancy, they only nauseate and offend by the association of paltry plagiarism and impudent inanity. It is only, however, on those who have read and remembered the original passages, and their better imitations, that this effect is produced. To the ignorant and the careless, the twentieth imitation has all the charm of an original; and that which oppresses the more experienced reader with weariness and disgust, rouses them with all the force and vivacity of novelty. It is not, then, because the ornaments of popular poetry are deficient in intrinsic worth and beauty, that they are slighted by the critical reader, but because he at once recognises them to be

stolen, and perceives that they are arranged without taste or congruity. In his indignation at the dishonesty, and his contempt for the poverty of the collector, he overlooks altogether the value of what he has collected, or remembers it only as an aggravation of his offence—as converting larceny into sacrilege, and adding the guilt of profanation to the folly of unsuitable finery. There are other features, no doubt, that distinguish the idols of vulgar admiration from the beautiful exemplars of pure taste; but this is so much the most characteristic and remarkable, that we know no way in which we could so shortly describe the poetry that pleases the multitude and displeases the select few, as by saying that it consisted of all the most known and most brilliant parts of the most celebrated authors—of a splendid and unmeaning accumulation of those images and phrases which had long charmed every reader in the works of their original inventors.

The justice of these remarks will probably be at once admitted by all who have attended to the history and effects of what may be called *poetical diction* in general, or even of such particular phrases and epithets as have been indebted to their beauty for too great a notoriety. Our associations with all this class of expressions, which have become trite only in consequence of their intrinsic excellence, now suggest to us no ideas but those of school-boy imbecility and childish affectation. We look upon them merely as the common, hired, and tawdry trappings of all who wish to put on, for the hour, the masquerade habit of

poetry; and, instead of receiving from them any kind of delight or emotion, do not even distinguish or attend to the signification of the words of which they consist. The ear is so palled with their repetition, and so accustomed to meet with them as the habitual expletives of the lowest class of versifiers, that they come at last to pass over it without exciting any sort of conception whatever, and are not even so much attended to as to expose their most gross incoherence or inconsistency to detection. It is of this quality that Swift has availed himself in so remarkable a manner, in his famous "Song by a person of quality," which consists entirely in a selection of some of the most trite and well-sounding phrases and epithets in the poetical lexicon, strung together without any kind of meaning or consistency, and yet so disposed as to have been perused, perhaps by one-half of their readers, without any suspicion of the deception. Most of those phrases, however, which had thus become sickening, and almost insignificant, to the intelligent readers of poetry in the days of Queen Anne, are in themselves beautiful and expressive, and, no doubt, retain much of their native grace in those ears that have not been alienated by their repetition.

But it is not merely from the use of much excellent diction, that a modern poet is thus debarred by the lavishness of his predecessors. There is a certain range of subjects and characters, and a certain manner and tone, which were probably in their origin as graceful and attractive, which have been proscribed

by the same dread of imitation. It would be too long to enter, in this place, into any detailed examination of the peculiarities—originating chiefly in this source — which distinguish ancient from modern poetry. It may be enough just to remark, that, as the elements of poetical emotion are necessarily limited, so it was natural for those who first sought to excite it, to avail themselves of those subjects, situations, and images that were most obviously calculated to produce that effect, and to assist them by the use of all those aggravating circumstances that most readily occurred as likely to heighten their operation. In this way, they got possession of all the choice materials of their art; and working without fear of comparisons, fell naturally into a free and graceful style of execution, at the same time that the profusion of their resources made them somewhat careless and inexpert in their application. After poets were in a very different situation. They could neither take the most natural and general topics of interest, nor treat them with the ease and indifference of those who had the whole store at their command—because this was precisely what had been already done by those who had gone before them; and they were therefore put upon various expedients for attaining their object, and yet preserving their claim to originality. Some of them set themselves to observe and delineate both characters and external objects with greater minuteness and fidelity—and others to analyse more carefully the mingling passions of the heart, and to feed and cherish a more limited

train of emotion through a longer and more artful career—while a third sort distorted both nature and passion according to some fantastical theory of their own, or took such a narrow corner of each, and dissected it with such curious and microscopic accuracy, that its original form was no longer discernible by the eyes of the uninstructed. In this way we think that modern poetry has both been enriched with more exquisite pictures, and deeper and more sustained strains of pathetic, than were known to the less elaborate artists of antiquity; at the same time that it has been defaced with more affectation, and loaded with far more intricacy. But whether they failed or succeeded—and whether they distinguished themselves from their predecessors by faults or by excellences, the later poets, we conceive, must be admitted to have almost always written in a more constrained and narrow manner than their originals, and to have departed farther from what was obvious, easy, and natural. Modern poetry, in this respect, may be compared, perhaps without any great impropriety, to modern sculpture. It is greatly inferior to the ancient in freedom, grace, and simplicity; but, in return, possesses a more decided expression, and more fine finishing of less suitable embellishments.

Whatever may be gained or lost, however, by this change of manner, it is obvious that poetry must become less popular by means of it. The most natural and obvious manner is always the most taking,—and whatever costs the author much pains

and labour is usually found to require a corresponding effort on the part of the reader, which all readers are not disposed to make. That they who seek to be original by means of affectation, should revolt more by their affectation than they attract by their originality, is just and natural; but even the nobler devices that win the suffrages of the judicious by their intrinsic beauty, as well as their novelty, are extremely apt to repel the multitude, and to obstruct the popularity of some of the most exquisite productions of genius. The beautiful but minute delineations of such admirable observers as Crabbe or Cowper, are apt to appear tedious to those who take no interest in their subjects, and no concern about their art;—and the refined, deep, and sustained pathetic of Campbell, is still more apt to be mistaken for monotony and languor, by those who are either devoid of sensibility, or impatient of quiet reflection. The most popular style undoubtedly is that which has great variety and brilliancy, rather than exquisite finish in its images and descriptions, and which touches lightly on many passions, without raising any so high as to transcend the comprehension of ordinary mortals, or dwelling on it so long as to exhaust their patience.

Whether Mr. Scott holds the same opinion with us upon these matters, and has intentionally conformed his practice to this theory—or whether the peculiarities in his compositions have been produced merely by following out the natural bent of his genius, we do not presume to determine; but that he has actually made

use of all our recipes for popularity we think very evident, and conceive, that few things are more curious than the singular skill, or good fortune, with which he has reconciled his claims on the favour of the multitude, with his pretensions to more select admiration. Confident in the force and originality of his own genius, he has not been afraid to avail himself of commonplaces both of diction and of sentiment, whenever they appeared to be beautiful or impressive —using them, however, at all times with the skill and spirit of an inventor; and quite certain that he could not be mistaken for a plagiarist or imitator, he has made free use of that great treasury of characters, images, and expressions which had been accumulated by the most celebrated of his predecessors—at the same time that the rapidity of his transitions, the novelty of his combinations, and the spirit and variety of his own thoughts and inventions, show plainly that he was a borrower from anything but poverty, and took only what he could have given if he had been born in an earlier generation. The great secret of his popularity, however, and the leading characteristic of his poetry, appear to us to consist evidently in this, that he has made more use of common topics, images, and expressions, than any original poet of later times; and at the same time displayed more genius and originality than any recent author who has worked in the same materials. By the latter peculiarity he has entitled himself to the admiration of every description of readers—by the former, he is recommended in an especial manner to the inexperienced, at the hazard

of some little offence to the more cultivated and fastidious.

In the choice of his subjects, for example, he does not attempt to interest merely by fine observation or pathetic sentiment, but takes the assistance of a story, and enlists the reader's curiosity among his motives for attention. Then his characters are all selected from the most common *dramatis personæ* of poetry —kings, warriors, knights, outlaws, nuns, minstrels, secluded damsels, wizards, and true lovers. He never ventures to carry us into the cottage of the peasant, like Crabbe or Cowper; nor into the bosom of domestic privacy, like Campbell; nor among creatures of the imagination, like Southey or Darwin. Such personages, we readily admit, are not in themselves so interesting or striking as those to whom Mr. Scott has devoted himself; but they are far less familiar in poetry, and are therefore more likely, perhaps, to engage the attention of those to whom poetry is familiar. In the management of the passions, again, Mr. Scott appears to us to have pursued the same popular and comparatively easy course. He has raised all the most familiar and poetical emotions by the most obvious aggravations, and in the most compendious and judicious way. He has dazzled the reader with the splendour, and even warmed him with the transient beat of various affections; but he has nowhere fairly kindled him with enthusiasm, or melted him into tenderness. Writing for the world at large, he has wisely abstained from attempting to raise any passion to a height to which worldly people

could not be transported, and contented himself with giving his reader the chance of feeling, as a brave, kind, and affectionate gentleman should often feel in the ordinary course of his existence, without trying to breathe into him either that lofty enthusiasm which disdains the ordinary business and amusements of life, or that quiet and deep sensibility which unfits for all its pursuits. With regard to diction and imagery too, it is quite obvious that Mr. Scott has not aimed at writing either in a pure or a very consistent style. He seems to have been anxious only to strike, and to be easily and universally understood, and for this purpose to have culled the most glittering and conspicuous expressions of the most popular authors, and to have interwoven them in splendid confusion with his own nervous diction and irregular versification. Indifferent whether he coins or borrows, and drawing with equal freedom on his memory and his imagination, he goes boldly forward, in full reliance on a never-failing abundance; and dazzles, with his richness and variety, even those who are most apt to be offended with his glare and irregularity. There is nothing, in Mr. Scott, of the severe and majestic style of Milton—or of the terse and fine composition of Pope—or of the elaborate elegance and melody of Campbell—or even of the flowing and redundant diction of Southey. But there is a medley of bright images and glowing words, set carelessly and loosely together—a diction tinged successively with the careless richness of Shakespeare, the harshness and antique simplicity of the old romances, the homeliness of vulgar ballads

and anecdotes, and the sentimental glitter of the most modern poetry—passing from the borders of the ludicrous to those of the sublime—alternately minute and energetic—sometimes artificial, and frequently negligent—but always full of spirit and vivacity—abounding in images that are striking, at first sight, to minds of every contexture—and never expressing a sentiment which it can cost the most ordinary reader any exertion to comprehend.

Such seem to be the leading qualities that have contributed to Mr. Scott's popularity; and as some of them are obviously of a kind to diminish his merit in the eyes of more fastidious judges, it is but fair to complete this view of his peculiarities by a hasty notice of such of them as entitle him to unqualified admiration—and here it is impossible not to be struck with that vivifying spirit of strength and animation which pervades all the inequalities of his composition, and keeps constantly on the mind of the reader the impression of great power, spirit, and intrepidity. There is nothing cold, creeping, or feeble, in all Mr. Scott's poetry—no laborious littleness, or puling classical affectation. He has his failures, indeed, like other people; but he always attempts vigorously; and never fails in his immediate object without accomplishing something far beyond the reach of an ordinary writer. Even when he wanders from the paths of pure taste, he leaves behind him the footsteps of a powerful genius; and moulds the most humble of his materials into a form worthy of a nobler substance. Allied to this inherent vigour and

animation, and in a great degree derived from it, is that air of facility and freedom, which adds so peculiar a grace to most of Mr. Scott's compositions. There is certainly no living poet whose works seem to come from him with so much ease, or who so seldom appears to labour, even in the most burdensome parts of his performance. He seems, indeed, never to think either of himself or his reader, but to be completely identified and lost in the personages with whom he is occupied; and the attention of the reader is consequently either transferred, unbroken, to their adventures, or, if it glance back for a moment to the author, it is only to think how much more might be done, by putting forth that strength at full, which has, without effort, accomplished so many wonders. It is owing partly to these qualities, and partly to the great variety of his style, that Mr. Scott is much less frequently tedious than any other bulky poet with whom we are acquainted. His store of images is so copious, that he never dwells upon one long enough to produce weariness in the reader; and even where he deals in borrowed or in tawdry wares, the rapidity of his transitions, and the transient glance with which he is satisfied as to each, leave the critic no time to be offended, and hurry him forward along with the multitude enchanted with the brilliancy of the exhibition. Thus the very frequency of his deviations from pure taste, comes, in some sort, to constitute their apology, and the profusion and variety of his faults to afford a new proof of his genius.

These, we think, are the general characteristics of

Mr. Scott's poetry. Among his minor peculiarities, we might notice his singular talent for description, and especially for the description of scenes abounding in *motion* or *action* of any kind. In this department, indeed, we conceive him to be almost without a rival, either among modern or ancient poets; and the character and process of his descriptions are as extraordinary as their effect is astonishing. He places before the eyes of his readers a more distinct and complete picture, perhaps, than any other artist ever presented by mere words; and yet he does not enumerate all the visible parts of the subject with any degree of minuteness, nor confine himself, by any means, to what is visible. The singular merit of his delineations, on the contrary, consists in this, that, with a few bold and abrupt strokes, he finishes a most spirited outline—and then instantly kindles it by the sudden light and colour of some moral affection. There are none of his fine descriptions, accordingly, which do not derive a great part of their clearness and picturesque effect, as well as their interest, from the quantity of character and moral expression which is thus blended with their details, and which, so far from interrupting the conception of the external object, very powerfully stimulate the fancy of the reader to complete it; and give a grace and a spirit to the whole representation, of which we do not know where to look for any other example.

Another very striking peculiarity in Mr. Scott's poetry, is the air of freedom and nature which he has contrived to impart to most of his distinguished

characters; and with which no poet more modern than Shakespeare has ventured to represent personages of such dignity. We do not allude here merely to the genuine familiarity and homeliness of many of his scenes and dialogues, but to that air of gaiety and playfulness in which persons of high rank seem, from time immemorial, to have thought it necessary to array, not their courtesy only, but their generosity and their hostility. This tone of good society, Mr. Scott has shed over his higher characters with great grace and effect; and has, in this way, not only made his representations much more faithful and true to nature, but has very agreeably relieved the monotony of that tragic solemnity which ordinary writers appear to think indispensable to the dignity of poetical heroes and heroines. We are not sure, however, whether he has not occasionally exceeded a little in the use of this ornament; and given, now and then, too coquetish and trifling a tone to discussions of great interest.

Mr. Scott has many other characteristic excellences; but we have already detained our readers too long with this imperfect sketch of his poetical character, and must proceed, without further delay, to give them some account of the work which is now before us. Of this, upon the whole, we are inclined to think more highly than of either of his former publications. We are more sure, however, that it has fewer faults, than that it has greater beauties; and as its beauties bear a strong resemblance to those with which the public has already been made familiar in these celebrated

works, we should not be surprised if its popularity were less splendid and remarkable. For our own parts, however, we are of opinion that it will be oftener read hereafter than either of them; and that, if it had appeared first in the series, their reception would have been less favourable than that which it has experienced. It is more polished in its diction, and more regular in its versification; the story is constructed with infinitely more skill and address; there is a greater proportion of pleasing and tender passages, with much less antiquarian detail; and, upon the whole, a larger variety of characters more artfully and judiciously contrasted. There is nothing so fine, perhaps, as the battle in *Marmion*—or so picturesque as some of the scattered sketches in the *Lay;* but there is a richness and a spirit in the whole piece which does not pervade either of these poems—a profusion of incident, and a shifting brilliancy of colouring, that reminds us of the witchery of Ariosto—and a constant elasticity, and occasional energy, which seem to belong more peculiarly to the author now before us.

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That the story, upon the whole, is well digested and happily carried on, is evident from the hold it keeps of the reader's attention through every part of its progress. It has the fault, indeed, of all stories that turn upon an *anagnorisis* or recognition, that the curiosity which is excited during the first reading is extinguished for ever when we arrive at the discovery. This, however, is an objection which may be made, in

some degree, to almost every story of interest; and we must say for Mr. Scott that his secret is very discreetly kept, and very felicitously revealed. If we were to scrutinise the fable with malicious severity, we might also remark that Malcolm Græme has too insignificant a part assigned him, considering the favour in which he is held both by Ellen and the author; and that, in bringing out the shaded and imperfect character of Roderick Dhu as a contrast to the purer virtue of his rival, Mr. Scott seems to have fallen into the common error of making him more interesting than he whose virtues he was intended to set off, and converted the villain of the piece in some measure into its hero. A modern poet, however, may perhaps be pardoned for an error of which Milton himself is thought not to have kept clear, and for which there seems so natural a cause, in the difference between poetical and amiable characters. There are several improbabilities, too, in the story, which might disturb a scrupulous reader. Allowing that the king of Scotland might have twice disappeared for several days, without exciting any disturbance or alarm in his courtiers, it is certainly rather extraordinary that neither the Lady Margaret, nor old Allan-bane, nor any of the attendants at the isle, should have recognised his person; and almost as wonderful, that he should have found any difficulty in discovering the family of his entertainer. There is something rather awkward, too, in the sort of blunder or misunderstanding (for it is no more) which gives occasion to Sir Roderick's gathering and all its consequences;

nor can any machinery be conceived more clumsy for effecting the deliverance of a distressed hero than the introduction of a mad woman, who, without knowing or caring about the wanderer, warns him, *by a song*, to take care of the ambush that was set for him. The maniacs of poetry have indeed had a prescriptive right to be musical, since the days of Ophelia downwards; but it is rather a rash extension of this privilege to make them sing good sense, and to make sensible people be guided by them.

Before taking leave of the fable, we must be permitted to express our disappointment and regret at finding the general cast of the characters and incidents so much akin to those of Mr. Scott's former publications. When we heard that the author of the *Lay* and of *Marmion* was employed upon a *Highland* story, we certainly expected to be introduced to a new creation, and to bid farewell, for a while, to knights, squires, courtiers, and chivalry;—but here they are all upon us again, in their old characters, and nearly in their old costume. The same age—the same sovereign—the same manners—the same ranks of society—the same tone, both for courtesy and for defiance. Loch Katrine, indeed, is more picturesque than St. Mary's Loch; and Roderick Dhu and his clan have some features of novelty;—but the Douglas and the king are the leading personages; and the whole interest of the story turns upon persons and events having precisely the same character and general aspect with those which gave their peculiar colour to the former poems. It is honourable to Mr.

Scott's genius, no doubt, that he has been able to interest the public so deeply with this third presentment of the same chivalrous scenes; but we cannot help thinking, that both his glory and our gratification would have been greater, if he had changed his hand more completely, and actually given us a true Celtic story, with all its drapery and accompaniments in a corresponding style of decoration.

Such a subject, we are persuaded, has very great capabilities, and only wants to be introduced to public notice by such a hand as Mr. Scott's, to make a still more powerful impression than he has already effected by the resurrection of the tales of romance. There are few persons, we believe, of any degree of poetical susceptibility, who have wandered among the secluded valleys of the Highlands, and contemplated the singular people by whom they are still tenanted—with their love of music and of song—their hardy and irregular life, so unlike the unvarying toils of the Saxon mechanic—their devotion to their chiefs—their wild and lofty traditions—their national enthusiasm—the melancholy grandeur of the scenes they inhabit—and the multiplied superstitions which still linger among them—without feeling that there is no existing people so well adapted for the purposes of poetry, or so capable of furnishing the occasions of new and striking inventions. The great and continued popularity of Macpherson's *Ossian* (though discredited as a memorial of antiquity, at least as much as is warranted by any evidence now before the public), proves how very fascinating a fabric might be

raised upon that foundation by a more powerful or judicious hand. That celebrated translation, though defaced with the most childish and disgusting affectations, still charms with occasional gleams of a tenderness beyond all other tenderness, and a sublimity of a new character of dreariness and elevation; and, though patched with pieces of the most offensive plagiarism, still maintains a tone of originality which has recommended it in every nation of the civilised world. The cultivated literati of England, indeed, are struck with the affectation and the plagiarism, and renounce the whole work as tawdry and factitious; but the vulgar at home, and almost all classes of readers abroad, to whom those defects are less perceptible, still continue to admire; and few of our classical poets have so sure and regular a sale, both in our own and in other languages, as the singular collection to which we have just alluded. A great part of its charm, we think, consists in the novelty of its Celtic characters and scenery, and their singular aptitude for poetic combinations; and therefore it is that we are persuaded, that if Mr. Scott's powerful and creative genius were to be turned in good earnest to such a subject, something might be produced still more impressive and original than even this age has yet witnessed.

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We must now take an abrupt leave of Mr. Scott by expressing our hope, and tolerably confident expectation, of soon meeting with him again. That he may injure his popularity by the mere profusion of his

publications is no doubt possible, though many of the most celebrated poets have been among the most voluminous; but that the public must gain by this liberality, does not seem to admit of any question. If our poetical treasures were increased by the publication of *Marmion* and the *Lady of the Lake*, notwithstanding the existence of great faults in both these works, it is evident that we should be still richer if we possessed fifty poems of the same merit; and, therefore, it is for our interest, whatever it may be as to his, that their author's muse should continue as prolific as she has hitherto been. If Mr. Scott will only vary his subjects a little more, indeed, we think we might engage to ensure his own reputation against any material injury from their rapid parturition; and, as we entertain very great doubts whether much greater pains would enable him to write much better poetry, we would rather have two beautiful poems, with the present *quantum* of faults, than one with only one-tenth part less alloy. He will always be a poet, we fear, to whom the fastidious will make great objections; but he may easily find, in his popularity, a compensation for their scruples. He has *the jury* hollow in his favour; and though *the court* may think that its directions have not been sufficiently attended to, it will not quarrel with the verdict.

FRANCIS JEFFREY.

The Edinburgh Review, October 1813.

DE L'ALLEMAGNE.

PAR MADAME LA BARONNE DE STAEL-HOLSTEIN.

3 *vols.*, 8*vo.* *London*, 1813.

MOST of our readers know that this work was suppressed at Paris about three years ago, after having passed through a rigorous examination by censors. The history of the examination and suppression, and the letter from the Minister of Police, given in the Preface, are extremely curious. They are characteristical of Napoleon's government, and documents for the general history of tyranny over literature. But it is the smallest distinction of this work, that it is the first of suppressed books. On other occasions, the circumstances of the publication would be the most interesting part of the book; but the intrinsic and permanent importance of Madame de Stael's work immediately brings us to the consideration of the subject.

Till the middle of the eighteenth century Germany was, in one important respect, singular among the great nations of Christendom. She had attained a high rank in Europe by discoveries and inventions, by science, by abstract speculation as well as positive

knowledge, by the genius and the art of war, and above all by the theological revolution, which unfettered the understanding in one part of Europe, and loosened its chains in the other. But she was without a national literature. The country of Guttenberg, of Copernicus, of Luther, of Kepler, and of Leibnitz, had no writer in her own language, whose name was known to the neighbouring nations. German captains and statesmen, philosophers and scholars, were celebrated; but German writers were unknown. The nations of the south indeed seemed to slumber. Those of the Spanish peninsula formed the exact contrast to Germany. She had every mark of mental cultivation but a vernacular literature. They, since the Reformation, had ceased to exercise their reason; and they retained only their poets, whom they were content to admire, without daring any longer to emulate. In Italy, Metastasio was the only renowned poet; and sensibility to the arts of design had survived genius. But the monuments of ancient times still kept alive the pursuits of antiquities and philology. The rivalship of small states, and the glory of former ages, preserved an interest in literary history. The national mind retained that tendency towards experimental science, which it perhaps principally owed to the fame of Galileo; and began also to take some part in those attempts to discover the means of bettering the human condition by inquiries into the principles of legislation and political economy, which form the most honourable distinction of the eighteenth century. France and England

abated nothing of their activity. Whatever may be thought of purity of taste, or soundness of opinion, in Montesquieu and Voltaire, Buffon and Rousseau, no man will dispute the vigour of their genius. The same period among us was not marked by the loss of any of our ancient titles to fame; and it was splendidly distinguished by the rise of the arts, of history, of oratory, and (shall we not add?) of painting.

But Germany remained a solitary example of a civilised, learned, and scientific nation, without a literature. The chivalrous ballads of the middle age, and the efforts of the Silesian poets in the beginning of the seventeenth century, were just sufficient to render the general defect more striking. French was the language of every court; and the number of courts in Germany rendered this circumstance almost equivalent to the exclusion of German from every society of rank. Philosophers employed a barbarous Latin, as they had throughout all Europe, till the Reformation had given dignity to the vernacular tongues, by employing them in the service of religion; and till Montaigne, Galileo and Bacon broke down the barrier between the learned and the people, by philosophising in a popular language. The German language continued to be the mere instrument of the most vulgar intercourse of life; Germany had, therefore, no exclusive mental possession; for poetry and eloquence may, and in some measure must be, national; but knowledge, which is the common patrimony of civilised men, can be appropriated by no people.

A great revolution, however, at length began, which in the course of half a century, terminated in bestowing on Germany a literature, perhaps the most characteristic possessed by a European nation. It had the important peculiarity of being the first which had its birth in an enlightened age. The imagination and sensibility of an infant poetry were singularly blended with the refinements of philosophy. A studious and learned people, familiar in the poets of other nations, with the first simplicity of nature and feeling, were too often tempted to pursue the singular, the excessive, and the monstrous. Their fancy was attracted towards the deformities and diseases of moral nature—the wildness of an infant literature, combined with the eccentric and fearless speculations of a philosophical age. Some of the qualities of the childhood of art were united to others which usually attend its decline. German literature, various, rich, bold, and at length, by an inversion of the usual progress, working itself into originality, was tainted with the exaggeration natural to the imitator, and to all those who know the passions rather by study than by feeling.

Another cause concurred to widen the chasm which separated the German writers from the most polite nations of Europe. While England and France had almost relinquished those more abstruse speculations which had employed them in the age of Gassendi and Hobbes, and with a confused mixture of contempt and despair, had tacitly abandoned questions which seemed alike inscrutable and unprofitable—a

metaphysical passion arose in Germany stronger and more extensive than had been known in Europe since the downfall of the scholastic philosophy. A system of metaphysics appeared, which, with the ambition natural to that science, aspired to dictate principles to every part of human knowledge. It was for a long time universally adopted. Other systems, derived from it, succeeded each other with the rapidity of fashions in dress. Metaphysical publications were multiplied almost to the same degree as political tracts in the most factious period of a popular government. The subject was soon exhausted, and the metaphysical passion seems to be nearly extinguished, for the small circle of dispute respecting first principles, must be always rapidly described ; and the speculator who thought his course infinite, finds himself almost instantaneously returned to the point from which he began. But the language of abstruse research has spread over the whole German style. Allusions to the most subtle speculations are common in popular writings. Bold metaphors, derived from their peculiar philosophy, are familiar in observations on literature and manners. The style of Germany at length differed from that of France, and even of England, more as the literature of the East differs from that of the West than as that of one European people from that of their neighbours.

Hence it partly arose that while physical and political Germany was so familiar to foreigners, intellectual and literary Germany continued almost unknown. Thirty years ago there were probably in

London as many Persian as German scholars. Neither Goethe nor Schiller conquered the repugnance. Political confusions, a timid and exclusive taste, and the habitual neglect of foreign languages, excluded German literature from France. Temporary and permanent causes contributed to banish it, after a short period of success, from England. Dramas, more remarkable for theatrical effect than for dramatic genius, exhibited scenes and characters of a paradoxical morality (on which no writer has animadverted with more philosophical and moral eloquence than Madame de Stael); unsafe even in the quiet of the schools, but peculiarly dangerous in the theatre, where it comes into contact with the inflammable passions of ignorant multitudes; and justly alarming to those who, with great reason, considered domestic virtue as one of the privileges and safeguards of the English nation. These moral paradoxes, which were chiefly found among the inferior poets of Germany, appeared at the same time with the political novelties of the French Revolution, and underwent the same fate. German literature was branded as the accomplice of free-thinking philosophy and revolutionary politics. It happened rather whimsically, that we now began to throw out the same reproaches against other nations, which the French had directed against us in the beginning of the eighteenth century. We were then charged by our polite neighbours with the vulgarity and turbulence of rebellious upstarts, who held nothing sacred in religion, or stable in government; whom "no king

could govern, and no God could please;" and whose coarse and barbarous literature could excite only the ridicule of cultivated nations. The political part of these charges we applied to America, which had retained as much as she could of our government and laws; and the literary part to Germany, where literature had either been formed on our models, or moved by a kindred impulse, even where it assumed somewhat of a different form. The same persons who applauded the wit, and pardoned the shocking licentiousness of English comedy, were loudest in their clamours against the immorality of the German theatre. In our zeal against a few scenes, dangerous only by over-refinement, we seemed to have forgotten the vulgar grossness which tainted the whole brilliant period from Fletcher to Congreve. Nor did we sufficiently remember, that the most daring and fantastical combinations of the German stage did not approach to that union of taste and sense in the thought and expression, with wildness and extravagance in the invention of monstrous character and horrible incident, to be found in some of our earlier dramas, which, for their energy and beauty, the public taste has lately recalled from oblivion.

The more permanent causes of the slow and small progress of German literature in France and England are philosophically developed in two beautiful chapters of the present work.[1] A translation from German into a language so different in its structure and origin as French, fails, as a piece of music composed for one

[1] Part II., Chaps. i. and ii.

sort of instrument when performed on another. In Germany, style, and even language, are not yet fixed. In France, rules are despotic—"the reader will not be amused at the expense of his literary conscience; there alone he is scrupulous." A German writer is above his Public, and firms it. A French writer dreads a Public already enlightened and severe. He constantly thinks of immediate effect. He is in society, even while he is composing; and never loses sight of the effect of his writings on those whose opinions and pleasantries he is accustomed to fear. The German writers have, in a higher degree, the first requisite for writing—the power of feeling with vivacity and force. In France, a book is read to be spoken of, and must therefore catch the spirit of society. In Germany, it is read by solitary students, who seek instruction or emotion; and "in the silence of retirement, nothing seems more melancholy than the spirit of the world." The French require a clearness which may sometimes render their writers superficial; and the Germans, in the pursuit of originality and depth, often convey obvious thoughts in an obscure style. In the dramatic art, the most national part of literature, the French are distinguished in whatever relates to the action, the intrigue, and the interest of events; but the Germans surpass them in representing the impressions of the heart, and the secret storms of the strong passions.

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In a short introduction, the principal nations of Europe are derived from three races, the Sclavonic,

the Latin, and the Teutonic. The imitative and feeble literature—the recent, precipitate, and superficial civilisation of the Sclavonic nations—sufficiently distinguish them from the two great races. The Latin nations who inhabit the south of Europe, are the most anciently civilised. Social institutions, blended with paganism, preceded their reception of Christianity; they have less disposition than their northern neighbours to abstract reflection; they understand better the business and pleasures of the world; they inherit the sagacity of the Romans in civil affairs; and "they alone, like those ancient masters, know how to practise the art of domination."

The Germanic nations who inhabit the north of Europe and the British islands, received their civilisation with Christianity; chivalry and the middle age are the subject of their traditions and legends. Their natural genius is more gothic than classical; they are distinguished by independence and good faith—by seriousness both in their talents and character, rather than by address or vivacity:—"The social dignity which the English owe to their political constitution, places them at the head of Teutonic nations, but does not exempt them from the character of the race."

The literature of the Latin nations is copied from the ancients, and retains the original colour of their polytheism. That of the nations of Germanic origin has a chivalrous basis, and is modified by a spiritual religion. The French and Germans are at the two extremities of the chain;—the French considering outward objects, and the Germans thought and feeling,

as the prime movers of the moral world. "The French nation, the most cultivated of Latin nations, inclines to a classical poetry. The English nation, the most illustrious of Germanic nations, delights in a poetry more romantic and chivalrous."

The theory which we have thus abridged is most ingenious, and exhibits in the liveliest form the distinction between different systems of literature and manners. It is partly true, for the principle of race is doubtless one of the most important in the history of mankind; and the first impressions on the susceptible character of rude tribes may be traced in the qualities of their most civilised descendants. But, considered as an exclusive and universal theory, it is not secure against the attacks of sceptical ingenuity. The facts do not seem entirely to correspond with it. It was among the Latin nations of the south, that chivalry and romance first flourished. Provence was the earliest seat of romantic poetry. A chivalrous literature predominated in Italy during the most brilliant period of Italian genius. The poetry of the Spanish peninsula seems to have been more romantic and less subjected to classical bondage than that of any other part of Europe. On the contrary, chivalry, which was the refinement of the middle age, penetrated more slowly into the countries of the north. In those less polished regions it was more rugged and obscure, and did not descend, as in the south, with that splendour and renown which acted upon the imagination of succeeding times. In general, the character of the literature of each European nation seems extremely

to depend upon the period at which it had reached its highest point of cultivation. Spanish and Italian poetry flourished while Europe was still chivalrous. French literature attained its highest splendour after the Grecian and Roman writers had become the object of universal reverence. The Germans cultivated their poetry a hundred years later, when the study of antiquity had revived the knowledge of the Gothic sentiments and principles. Nature produced a chivalrous poetry in the sixteenth century; learning in the eighteenth. Perhaps the history of English poetry reflects the revolution of European taste more distinctly than that of any other nation. We have successively cultivated a Gothic poetry from nature, a classical poetry from imitation, and a second Gothic from the study of our own ancient poets.

To this consideration it must be added that Catholic and Protestant nations must differ in their poetical system. The festal shows and legendary polytheism of the Catholics had the effect of a sort of Christian Paganism. The Protestant poetry was spiritualised by the genius of their worship, and was undoubtedly exalted by the daily perusal of translations of the sublime poems of the Hebrews, a discipline without which it is probable that the nations of West never could have been prepared to endure Oriental poetry. Religion conquered the first repugnance, and familiar use gave it an influence still discernible in that tendency towards deep emotion and sublime imagery which characterises, though in different forms, both English and German poetry.

In justice, however, to the ingenious theory of Madame de Stael, it ought to be observed, that the original character ascribed by her to the Northern nations, must have disposed them to the adoption of a Protestant faith and worship, while the Popery of the South was naturally preserved by an early disposition to a splendid ceremonial, and a various and flexible mythology.

The work is divided into four parts:—On Germany and German manners; on literature and the arts; on philosophy and morals; on religion and enthusiasm.

The first is the most perfect in its kind; belongs the most entirely to the genius of the writer; and affords the best example of the talent for painting nations which we have attempted to describe. It seems also, as far as foreign critics can presume to decide, to be in the most finished style of any composition of the author, and more securely to bid defiance to that minute criticism which, in other works, her genius rather disdained than propitiated.[1] The Germans are a just, constant, and sincere people; with great power of imagination and reflection; without brilliancy in society, or address in affairs; slow, and easily intimidated in action; adventurous and fearless in speculation; often uniting enthusiasm for the elegant arts, with little progress in the manners and refinements of life; more capable of being inflamed by opinions than by interests; obedient to authority, rather from an orderly and mechanical character than from servility—having

[1] Part I., Chaps. i.-iv.

learnt to value liberty neither by the enjoyment of it, nor by severe oppression; divested by the nature of their governments, and the division of their territories, of patriotic pride; too prone in the relations of domestic life to substitute fancy and feeling for positive duty; not unfrequently combining a natural character with artificial manners, and much real feeling with affected enthusiasm; divided by the sternness of feudal demarcation into an unlettered nobility, unpolished scholars, and a depressed commonalty; and exposing themselves to derision when, with their grave and clumsy honesty, they attempt to copy the lively and dexterous profligacy of their Southern neighbours.

In the plentiful provinces of Southern Germany,[1] where religion, as well as government, shackled the activity of speculation, the people had sunk into a sort of lethargic comfort and stupid enjoyment. It was a heavy and monotonous country, with no arts, except the national art of instrumental music;—no literature, a rude utterance;—no society, or only crowded assemblies, which seemed to be brought together for ceremonial more than for pleasure;—"an obsequious politeness towards an aristocracy without elegance." In Austria, more especially, are seen a calm and languid mediocrity, in sensations and desires; a people mechanical in their very sports—"whose existence is neither disturbed nor exalted by guilt or genius, by intolerance or enthusiasm;" a phlegmatic administration, inflexibly adhering to

[1] Part I., Chaps. v., vi., vii., and viii.

its ancient course—repelling knowledge on which the vigour of States must now depend; great societies of amiable and respectable persons—which suggest the reflection, that "in retirement monotony composes the soul, but in the world it wearies the mind."

In the rigorous climate and gloomy towns of Protestant Germany only the national mind is displayed. There the whole literature and philosophy were assembled. Berlin was slowly rising to be the capital of enlightened Germany. The Duchess of Weimar, who compelled Napoleon to respect her in the intoxication of victory, had changed her little capital into a seat of knowledge and elegance, under the auspices of Goethe, Wieland, and Schiller. No European palace had assembled so refined a society since some of the small Italian courts of the sixteenth century. It is only by the Protestant provinces of the North, that Germany is known as a lettered and philosophical country.

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The second, and most generally amusing, as well as the largest part of this work, is an animated sketch of the literary history of Germany, with criticisms on the most celebrated German poets and poems, interspersed with reflections equally original and beautiful, tending to cultivate a comprehensive taste in the fine arts, and to ingraft the love of virtue on the sense of beauty. Of the poems criticised, some are well known to most of our readers. The earlier pieces of Schiller were generally read in translations of various merit—though, except *The Robbers*, they are not by the present taste of Germany placed in the first class of his

works. The versions of *Leonora*, of *Oberon*, of *Wallenstein*, of *Nathan*, and of *Iphigenia in Tauris*, are among those which do the most honour to English literature.

Goetz of Berlichingen has been vigorously rendered by a writer whose chivalrous genius, has been exerted upon somewhat similar scenes of British history, has since rendered him the most popular poet of his age.

An epic poem, or a poetical romance, has lately been discovered in Germany, entitled *Niebelungen*—on the Destruction of the Burgundians by Attila; and it is believed, that at least some parts of it were composed not long after the event, though the whole did not assume its present shape till the completion of the vernacular languages about the beginning of the thirteenth century.[1] Luther's version of the Scriptures is an epoch in German literature. One of the innumerable blessings of the Reformation was to make reading popular by such translations, and to accustom the people to weekly attempts at some sort of argument or declamation in their native tongue. The vigorous mind of the great Reformer gave to his translation an energy and conciseness, which made it a model in style, as well as an authority in language. Hagedorn, Weiss, and Gellert, copied the French without vivacity;[2] and Bodmer imitated the English without genius. At length, Klopstock, an imitator of Milton,

[1] An ingenious and celebrated writer has promised a more particular account of this most curious monument.—Sismondi, *Literature du Midi*, vol. i. p 38.

[2] "Leurs ouvrages n'etoient que du Français appesanti."

formed a German poetry, and Wieland improved the language and versification; though this accomplished writer has somewhat suffered in his reputation, by the recent zeal of the Germans against the imitation of any foreign, but especially of the French, school.

"Il faut, pour imiter Voltaire, une insouciance moqueuse et philosophique qui rend indifferent à tout excepté la manière picquante d'exprimer cette insouciance. Jamais un Allemand ne peut arriver à cette brilliante liberté de plaisanterie; la verité l'attache trop, il veut scavoir et expliquer c'est que les choses sont."—Part II., Chap. iv.

"The genius of Klopstock was enflamed by the perusal of Milton and Young." This combination of names is astonishing to an English ear. It creates a presumption against the poetical sensibility of Klopstock, to find that he combined two poets, placed at an immeasurable distance from each other, and whose whole superficial resemblance arises from some part of Milton's subject, and from the doctrines of their theology, rather than the spirit of their religion. —Through all the works of Young, written with such a variety of temper and manner, there predominates one talent, inexhaustible wit, with little soundness of reason or depth of sensibility. His melancholy is artificial; and his combinations are as grotesque and fantastic in his *Night Thoughts* as in his *Satires.* How exactly does a poet characterise his own talent, who opens a series of poetical meditations on death and immortality, by a satirical epigram against the selfishness of the world?—Wit and ingenuity are the

only talents which Milton disdained. He is simple in his conceptions, even when his diction is overloaded with gorgeous learning. He is never gloomy but when he is grand. He is the painter of Love, as well as of Terror. He did not aim at Mirth; but he is cheerful whenever he descends from higher feelings. And nothing tends more to inspire a calm and constant delight, than the contemplation of that ideal purity and grandeur which he, above all poets, had the faculty of bestowing on every form of moral nature.

Klopstock's ode on the rivalship of the muse of Germany with the muse of Albion, is elegantly translated by Madame de Stael; and we applaud her taste for preferring prose to verse in French translations of German poems. After having spoken of Winkelman, and of Lessing, the most perspicuous, concise, and lively of German prose-writers, she proceeds to Schiller and Goethe, the greatest of German poets. Schiller presents only the genius of a great poet, and the character of a virtuous man. The first interview with him furnishes a very pleasing anecdote.

"La première fois que j'ai vu Schiller, c'étoit dans le salon du Duc et la Duchesse de Weimar, en présence d'une société aussi éclairée qu'imposante: il lisoit trēs bien le Français, mais il ne l'avoit jamais parlé; je soutins avec chaleur la supériorité de notre système dramatique sur tous les autres; il ne se réfusa point à me combattre et sans s'inquieter des difficultés et de lenteurs qu'il éprouvait en s'exprimant en Français, sans redouter non plus l'opinion des auditeurs, qui étoit contraire à la sienne, sa conviction

intime le fit parler. Je me servis d'abord pour le refuter, des armées Françaises la vivacité et la plaisanterie; mais bientôt je demêlai dans ce que disoit Schiller tant d'idées à travers l'obstacles des mots, je fus si frappée de cette simplicité de caractère qui portoit un homme de genie à s'engager ainsi dans une lutte où les paroles manquoient à ses pensées, je le trouvai si modeste et si insouciant dans ce qui ne concernoit que ses propres succées, si fier et si animé dans le défense de ce qu'il croyoit la verité, que je lui vouai dès cet instant une amitié pleine d'admiration."

The original, singular, and rather admirable than amiable mind of Goethe—his dictatorial power over national literature—his inequality, caprice, originality, and fire in conversation—his union of a youthful imagination with exhausted sensibility, and the impartiality of a stern sagacity, neither influenced by opinions nor predelictions—are painted with extraordinary skill.

Among the tragedies of Schiller which have appeared since we have ceased to translate German dramas, the most celebrated are, *Mary Stuart*, *Joan of Arc*, and *William Tell*. Such subjects as Mary Stuart generally excite an expectation which cannot be gratified. We agree with Madame de Stael in admiring many scenes of Schiller's Mary, and especially her noble farewell to Leicester. But the tragedy would probably displease English readers, to say nothing of spectators. Our political disputes have given a more inflexible reality to the events of Elizabeth's reign, than history would otherwise have

bestowed on facts equally modern. Neither of our parties could endure a Mary who confesses the murder of her husband, or an Elizabeth who instigates the assassination of her prisoner. In *William Tell*, Schiller has avoided the commonplaces of a republican conspiration, and faithfully represented the indignation of an oppressed Helvetian Highlander.

Egmont is considered by Madame de Stael as the finest of Goethe's tragedies, written, like *Werther*, in the enthusiasm of his youth. It is rather singular that poets have availed themselves so little of the chivalrous character, the illustrious love, and the awful malady of Tasso. The *Torquato Tasso* of Goethe is the only attempt to convert this subject to the purposes of the drama. Two men of genius of very modern times have suffered in a somewhat similar manner; but the habits of Rousseau's life were vulgar; and the sufferings of Cowper are both recent and sacred.

The scenes translated from the *Faust* of Goethe well represent the terrible energy of that most odious of the works of genius, in which the whole power of imagination is employed to dispel the charms which poetry bestows on human life;—where the punishment of vice proceeds from cruelty without justice, and "where the remorse seems as infernal as the guilt."

Since the death of Schiller, and the desertion of the drama by Goethe, several tragic writers have appeared, of whom the most celebrated are Werner, the author of Luther, and of Attila, Gerstenberg, Illinger, Tieck, Collin, and Oechlenschlager, a Dane, who has introduced into his poetry the terrible mythology of

Scandinavia. The result of the Chapter on Comedy seems to be that the comic genius has not yet arisen in Germany. German novels have been more translated into English than other works of literature; and a novel by Tieck, entitled *Sternbald*, seems to deserve translation. J. P. Richter, a popular novelist, but too national to bear translation, said, "That the French had the empire of the land, the English that of the sea, and the Germans that of the air." Though Schiller wrote the history of the Belgic revolt and of the Thirty-years war with eloquence and the spirit of liberty, the only classical writer in this department is J. de Müller, the historian of Switzerland. Though born in a speculative age, he has chosen the picturesque and dramatic manner of ancient historians, and his minute erudition in the annals of the middle age supplies his imagination with the particulars which characterise persons and actions. He abuses his extent of knowledge and power of detail; he sometimes affects the sententiousness of Tacitus; and his pursuit of antique phraseology occasionally degenerates into affectation. But his diction is in general grave and severe, and in his *Posthumous Abridgment of Universal History* he has shown great talents for that difficult sort of composition—the power of comprehensive outline; of compression without obscurity; of painting characters by few and grand strokes; and of disposing events so skilfully that their causes and effects are seen without being pointed out. Like Sallust, another affector of archaism, and declaimer against his age, his private and political life is said to

have been repugnant to his historical morality. "The reader of Müller is desirous of believing that of all the virtues which he strongly felt in the composition of his works, there were at least some which he permanently possessed."

The estimate of literary Germany would not be complete without the observation that it possesses a greater number of laborious scholars, and of useful books, than any other country. The possession of other languages may open more literary enjoyment; the German is assuredly the key to most knowledge. The works of Fulleborn, Buhle, Tiedman, and Tenneman are the first attempts to form a philosophical history of philosophy, of which the learned compiler Brucker had no more conception than a monkish annalist of rivalling Hume. The philosophy of literary history is one of the most recently opened fields of speculation. A few beautiful fragments of it are among the happiest parts of Hume's *Essays*. The great work of Madame de Stael on literature, was the first attempt on a bold and extensive scale. In the neighbourhood of her late residence, and perhaps not uninfluenced by her spirit, two writers of great merit, though of dissimilar character, have very recently treated various parts of this wide subject: M. Sismondi, in his *History of the Literature of the South;* and M. Barrente, in his *Picture of French Literature during the Eighteenth Century*. Sismondi, guided by Bouterwek and Schlegel, hazards larger views; indulges his talent for speculation, and seems with difficulty to suppress

that bolder spirit, and those more liberal principles which breathe in his History of the Italian Republic. Barrente, more thoroughly imbued with the elegancies and the prejudices of his national literature, feels more delicately the peculiarities of great writers, and traces with a more refined sagacity the immediate effects of their writings. But his work, under a very ingenious disguise of literary criticism, is an attack on the opinions of the eighteenth century; and it will assuredly never be honoured by the displeasure either of Napoleon, or of any of his successors in absolute power.

One chapter is chiefly employed on the works and system of William and Frederic Schlegel, of whom William is celebrated for his lectures on dramatic poetry, for his admirable translation of Shakespeare, and for versions, said to be of equal excellence, of the Spanish dramatic poets; and Frederic, besides his other merits, has the very singular distinction of having acquired the Sanscrit language, and studied the Indian learning and science in Europe, chiefly by the aid of a British Orientalist, long detained as a prisoner at Paris. The general tendency of the literary system of these critics, is towards the manners, poetry, and religion of the middle age. They have reached the extreme point towards which the general sentiment of Europe has been impelled by the calamities of a philosophical revolution, and the various fortunes of a twenty years' universal war. They are peculiarly adverse to French literature; which, since the age of Louis XIV., has, in their opinion, weakened the

primitive principles common to all Christendom as well as divested the poetry of each people of its originality and character. Their system is exaggerated and exclusive. In pursuit of national originality, they lose sight of the primary and universal beauties of art. The imitation of our own antiquities may be as artificial as the copy of a foreign literature. Nothing is less natural than a modern antique.

In a comprehensive system of literature, there is sufficient place for the irregular works of sublime genius, and for the faultless models of classical taste. From age to age, the multitude fluctuates between various, and sometimes opposite fashions of literary activity. They are not all of equal value. But the philosophical critic discovers and admires the common principles of beauty, from which they all derive their power over human nature.

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The Third Part of this work is the most singular. An account of metaphysical systems by a woman, is a novelty in the history of the human mind; whatever may be thought of its success in some of the parts, it must be regarded on the whole as the boldest effort of the female intellect. It must, however, not be forgotten, that it is a contribution rather to the history of human nature, than to that of speculation; and that it considers the source, spirit, and moral influence of metaphysical opinions, more than their truth or falsehood. "Metaphysics are at least the gymnastics of the understanding." The commonplace clamour of mediocrity will naturally be excited by

the sex, and even by the genius of the author. Every example of vivacity and grace, every exertion of fancy, every display of eloquence, every effusion of sensibility, will be cited as a presumption against the depth of her researches, and the accuracy of her statements. On such principles the evidence against her would doubtless be conclusive. But dulness is not accuracy;—ingenious and elegant writers are not therefore superficial; and those who are best acquainted with the philosophical revolutions of Germany, will be most astonished at the general correctness of this short, clear, and agreeable exposition.

The character of Lord Bacon is a just and noble tribute to his genius. Several eminent writers of the Continent have, however, lately fallen into the mistake of ascribing to him a system of opinions respecting the origin and first principles of human knowledge. What distinguishes him among great philosophers is, that he taught no peculiar opinions, but wholly devoted himself to the improvement of the method of philosophising. He belongs neither to the English nor to any other school of metaphysics; for he was not a metaphysician. Mr. Locke was not a moralist; and his collateral discussions of ethical subjects are not among the valuable parts of his great work.

"The works of Dugald Stewart contain so perfect a theory of the intellectual faculties, that it may be considered as the natural history of a moral being." The French metaphysicians of the eighteenth century, since Condillac, deserve the contempt expressed for

them, by their shallow, precipitate, and degrading misapplications of the Lockian philosophy. It is impossible to abridge the abridgment here given of the Kantian philosophy, or of those systems which have arisen from it; and which continue to dispute the supremacy of the speculative world. Those opinions of Kant are more fully stated, because he changed the general manner of thinking, and gave the new direction to the national mind. Those of Fichte, Schelling, and his other successors, it is of less importance to the proper purpose of this work to detail; because, though their doctrines be new, they continue to produce the same effect on national character; and they exert the same influence in other sciences and arts. The manner of philosophising remains the same in the Idealism of Fichte, and in the Pantheism of Schelling. Under various names and forms, it is the general tendency of the German philosophy to consider thought, not as the produce of objects, or as one of the classes of phenomena, but as the agent which exhibits the appearance of the outward world, and which regulates those operations which it seems only to represent. The philosophy of the human understanding is, in all countries, acknowledged to contain the principles of all sciences; but in Germany metaphysical speculation pervades their application to particulars.

The subject of the Fourth Part is the state of Religion, and the nature of all those disinterested and exalted sentiments which are here comprehended under the name of Enthusiasm. A contemplative

people like the Germans, have in their character the principle which disposes men to religion. The reformation, which was their revolution, arose from Ideas. "Of all the great men whom Germany has produced, Luther has the most German character. His firmness had something rude; his conviction made him opinionated; intellectual boldness was the source of his courage; in action the ardour of his passions did not divert him from abstract studies; and though he attacked certain dogmas and practices, he was not urged to the attack by incredulity, but by enthusiasm."

The right of examining what we ought to believe is the foundation of Protestantism. Though each of the first reformers established a practical Popery in his own church, opinions were gradually liberalised, and the temper of sects was softened. But little open incredulity had appeared in Germany; and even Lessing speculated with far more circumspection than had been observed by a series of English writers from Hobbes to Bolingbroke. Secret unbelievers were friendly to Christianity and Protestantism, as institutions beneficial to mankind, and far removed from that anti-religious fanaticism which was more naturally provoked in France by the intolerant spirit and invidious splendour of a Catholic hierarchy.

The reaction of the French Revolution has been felt throughout Europe, in religion as well as in politics. Many of the higher classes adopted some portion of those religious sentiments of which they at first assumed the exterior, as a badge of their hostility to the fashions of France. The sensibility of the

multitude, impatient of cold dogmatism and morality, eagerly sought to be once more roused by a religion which employed popular eloquence, and spoke to imagination and emotion. The gloom of general convulsions and calamities created a disposition to seriousness, and to the consolations of piety. And the disasters of a revolution allied to incredulity, threw a more than usual discredit and odium on irreligious opinions. In Great Britain these causes have acted most conspicuously on the inferior classes; though they have also powerfully affected many enlightened and accomplished individuals of a higher condition. In France, they have produced in some men of letters the play of a sort of poetical religion round the fancy. But the general effect seems to be a disposition to establish a double doctrine, a system of infidelity for the initiated, with a contemptuous indulgence and even active encouragement of superstition among the vulgar, like that which prevailed among the ancients before the rise of Christianity, from the revival of which the Lutheran reformation seems to have preserved Europe, and which, though not so furious and frantic as the atheistical fanaticism of the Reign of Terror, is, beyond any permanent condition of human society, destructive of ingenuousness, good faith and probity; of intellectual courage and manly character; and of that respect for all human beings, without which there can be no justice or humanity from the powerful towards the humble.

In Germany the effects have been also very remarkable. Some men of eminence in literature have

become Catholics. In general, their tendency is towards a pious mysticism, which almost equally loves every sect where a devotional spirit prevails. They have returned rather to sentiment than to dogma; more to religion than to theology.

Their disposition to religious feeling, which they call *religiosity*, is, to use the words of a rigidly orthodox English theologian, "a love of divine things for the beauty of their moral qualities." It is the love of the good and fair, wherever it exists, but chiefly when absolute and boundless excellence is contemplated in "the first good, first perfect, and first fair." This moral enthusiasm easily adapts itself to the various ceremonies of worship, and even systems of opinion prevalent among mankind. The devotional spirit, contemplating different parts of the order of nature, or influenced by a different temper of mind, may give rise to very different, and apparently repugnant theological doctrines. These doctrines are considered as modifications of human nature, under the influence of the religious principle; not as propositions which argument can either establish or confute, or reconcile with each other. The ideal philosophy favours this singular manner of considering the subject. As it leaves no reality but in the mind, it lessens the distance between belief and imagination; and disposes its adherents to regard opinions as the mere play of the understanding, incapable of being measured by any outward standard, and important chiefly from reference to sentiment, from which they spring, and on which they powerfully react. The

union of a mystical piety, with a philosophy verging towards Idealism, has accordingly been observed in periods of the history of human understanding, very distant from each other, and in most of their other circumstances extremely dissimilar. The same language, respecting the annihilation of self, and of the world, may be used by the sceptic and by the enthusiast. Among the Hindu philosophers in the most ancient times, among the *Sufis* in modern Persia, during the ferment of eastern and western opinions, which produced the latter Platonism in Malebranche and his English disciple Norris, and in Berkeley himself, though in a tempered and mitigated state, the tendency to this union may be distinctly traced. It seems, however, to be fitted only to few men ; and to them not long. Sentiments so sublime, and so distant from the vulgar affairs and boisterous passions of men, may be preserved for a time, in the calm solitude of a contemplative visionary. But in the bustle of the world they are likely soon to evaporate, when they are neither embodied in opinions, nor adorned by ceremonies, nor animated by the attack and defence of controversy. When the ardour of a short-lived enthusiasm has subsided, the poetical philosophy which exalted fancy to the level of belief, may probably leave the same ultimate result with the argumentative scepticism which lowered belief to the level of fancy.

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To affect any tenderness in pointing out the defects or faults of such a work would be an absurd

assumption of superiority. It has no need of mercy. The most obvious and general objection will be that the Germans are too much praised. But every writer must be allowed to value his subject somewhat higher than the spectator. Unless the German feelings had been adopted, they could not have been forcibly represented.

It will also be found that the objection is more apparent than real. Madame de Stael is indeed the most generous of critics; but she almost always speaks the whole truth to intelligent ears, though she often hints the unfavourable parts of it so gently and politely, that they may escape the notice of a hasty reader, and be scarcely perceived by a gross understanding. A careful reader, who brings together all the observations intentionally scattered over various parts of the book, will find sufficient justice (though administered in mercy) in whatever respects manners or literature. It is on subjects of philosophy that the admiration will perhaps justly be considered as more undistinguishing. Something of the wonder excited by novelty in language and opinion, still influences her mind. Many writers have acquired philosophical celebrity in Germany, who, if they had written with equal power, would have been unnoticed or soon forgotten in England. Our theosophists, the Hutchinsonians, had as many men of talent among them, as those whom Madame de Stael has honoured by her mention among the Germans. But they are long since irrecoverably sunk into oblivion. There is a writer now alive in England, who has published doctrines not

dissimilar to those which Madame de Stael ascribes to Schelling. Notwithstanding the allurements of a singular character, and an unintelligible style, his paradoxes are probably not known to a dozen persons in this busy country of industry and ambition. In a bigoted age he might have suffered the martyrdom of Vanini or Bruno. In a metaphysical country, where a publication was the most interesting event, and where twenty Universities, unfettered by Church or State, were hot-beds of speculation, he might have acquired celebrity as the founder of a sect.

In this, as in the other writings of Madame de Stael, the reader (or at least the lazy English reader) is apt to be wearied by too constant a demand upon his admiration. It seems to be her literary system, that the pauses of eloquence must be filled up by ingenuity. Nothing plain and unornamented is left in composition. But we desire a plain groundwork, from which wit or eloquence is to arise when the occasion calls them forth. The effect would be often greater if the talent were less. The natural power of interesting scenes or events over the heart, is somewhat disturbed by too uniform a colour of sentiment, and by the constant pursuit of uncommon reflections or ingenious turns. The eye is dazzled by unvaried brilliancy. We long for the grateful vicissitude of repose.

In the statement of facts and reasonings, no style is more clear than that of Madame de Stael. What is so lively must indeed be clear. But in the expression of sentiment she has been often thought to use vague language. In expressing either intense degrees, or

delicate shades, or intricate combinations of feeling, the common reader will seldom understand that of which he has never been conscious; and the writer placed on the extreme frontiers of human nature, is in danger of mistaking chimeras for realities, or of failing in a struggle to express what language does not afford the means of describing. There is also a vagueness incident to the language of feeling, which is not so properly a defect, as a quality which distinguishes it from the language of thought. Very often in poetry, and sometimes in eloquence, it is the office of words not so much to denote a succession of separate ideas, as, like musical sounds, to inspire a series of emotions, or to produce a durable tone of sentiment. The terms perspicuity and precision, which denote the relations of language to intellectual discernment, are inapplicable to it when employed as the mere vehicle of a succession of feelings. A series of words may in this manner be very expressive, where few of them singly convey a precise meaning. And men of greater intellect than susceptibility in such passages as those of Madame de Stael, where eloquence is employed chiefly to inspire feeling, unjustly charge their own defects to that deep, moral, and poetical sensibility with which they are unable to sympathise.

The few persons in Great Britain who continue to take an interest in speculative philosophy, will certainly complain of some injustice in the estimate of metaphysical systems.

The moral painter of nations is indeed more

authorised than the speculative philosopher to try these opinions by their tendencies and results. When the logical consequences of an opinion are false, the opinion itself must be also false; but whether the supposed pernicious influence of the adoption, or habitual contemplation of an opinion, be a legitimate objection to the opinion itself, is a question which has not yet been decided to the general satisfaction, nor perhaps even stated with sufficient precision.

There are certain facts in human nature, derived either from immediate consciousness or unvarying observation, which are more certain than the conclusions of any abstract reasoning, and which metaphysical theories are destined only to explain. That a theory is at variance with such facts, and logically leads to the denial of their existence, is a strictly philosophical objection to the theory; that there is a real distinction between right and wrong, in some measure apprehended and felt by all men; that moral sentiments and disinterested affections, however originating, are actually a part of our nature; that praise and blame, reward and punishment, may be properly bestowed on actions according to their moral character,—are principles as much more indubitable as they are more important than any theoretical conclusions. Whether they be demonstrated by reason, or perceived by intuition, or revealed by a primitive sentiment, they are equally indispensable parts of every sound mind. Every reasonable man is entitled instantly to reject a new opinion avowedly repugnant to those convictions from which he cannot depart.

They are facts, which it is the office of theory to explain, and which no true theory can deny. But the mere inconvenience or danger of an opinion can never be allowed as an argument against its truth. It is indeed the duty of every good man to present to the public what he believes to be truth, in such a manner as may least wound the feelings, or disturb the principles of the simple and the ignorant: and that duty is not always easily reconcilable with the duties of sincerity and free inquiry.—The collision of such conflicting duties is the painful and inevitable consequence of the ignorance of the multitude, and of the immature state, even in the highest minds, of the great talent for presenting truth under all its aspects, and adapting it to all the degrees of capacity or varieties of prejudice which distinguish men. That talent must one day be formed; and we may be perfectly assured that the whole of truth can never be injurious to the whole of virtue.

In the mean time, eloquent philosophers[1] would act more magnanimously, and therefore, perhaps more wisely, if they were to suspend, during discussion, their moral anger against doctrines which they deem pernicious; and, while they estimate actions, habits, and institutions, by their tendency, if they were to weigh opinions in the mere balance of reason, virtue in action required the impulse of sentiment, and even of enthusiasm. But in theoretical researches, her champions must not appear to decline the combat on

[1] The observation may be applied to Cicero and Stewart (*Philos. Ess.*, 186), as well as Madame de Stael.

any ground chosen by their adversaries, and least of all on that of intellect. To call in the aid of popular feelings in philosophical contests, is some avowal of weakness. It seems a more magnanimous wisdom to defy attack from every quarter, and by every weapon; and to use no topics which can be thought to imply an unworthy doubt whether the principles of virtue be impregnable by argument, or to betray an irreverent distrust of the final and perfect harmony between morality and truth.

Our moral philosophers will wonder that Madame de Stael seems to be acquainted with the doctrine of utility, only in the offensive form of universal selfishness. In this respect, it is true, she resembles the German Philosophers. But the selfish system, properly so called, has long been exploded in this island. Hobbes, the last philosopher of high rank who espoused it, has indeed discovered wonderful power in the analysis of perception and reason; but his superiority forsakes him when he attempts a theory of emotion and sentiment. The character of system has been foolishly ascribed to the maxims of the Duc de la Rochefoucault;—a series of poignant and brilliant epigrams, with the usual epigrammatic exaggeration against the selfishness of the world, by a disinterested, affectionate, and gallant man. With not less absurdity, the title of the founder of an ethical theory has been bestowed on Mandeville, a satirist for the populace, with a coarse athletic understanding, and a fancy that contemplated only the low and ludicrous aspects of human nature, but eminently

endowed with the talents of vulgar drollery, and plebeian declamation. Perhaps it must be allowed, that Paley has made too near approaches, especially in his definition of virtue, to this system. He was a person of unrivalled practical understanding. His prudential counsels are admirable; and he is one of the safest guides through human life. But he rather teaches duty, than inspires virtue. His school is more likely to form blameless and respectable men, than to send forth those moral heroes who are not afraid to die for their beloved friends or for their country. Neither his understanding nor his character peculiarly fitted him for a theorist. Nature had endowed and disposed him for the conduct of affairs. He was averse from the subtleties of speculation, and he perhaps looked with the contempt natural to the stern shrewdness of the world, on that ardour and that refinement of feeling which alone can reveal to us some of the most important secrets of our own moral constitution. Reason, without sensibility, is as much without materials, in morals, as she would be without the eye, in inquiries into the nature of light and colours. But, in justice to this eminent and excellent person, the principal ornament of the English church in the last half century, it must be added, that the species of interest held out by religion, being remote from us, unlike the vulgar objects which are commonly comprehended under the name of interest, and from its sublime and inscrutable nature, capable of being refined by a pure mind, until synonymous with indefinite progress in reason and virtue, has little of

that tendency to lower the moral sentiments, which cannot be denied to belong to systems of prudential ethics, founded on a perpetual calculation of the near and gross interests of the present world. Nor must it be forgotten, that the ardour of the devotional affections must render the religious moralist unconsciously disinterested in his feelings, whatever may be the selfish taint of his theory.

A scoffer might with some truth tell us, that German philosophy is founded in a repugnance to every system which has experience for its basis, or happiness for its end. Madame de Stael would probably justify the repugnance, by contending that the metaphysics of experience uniformly led to scepticism, and the ethics of utility naturally terminated in selfishness. There is indeed a permanent hostility between modes of philosophy still more irreconcilable in their spirit and genius, than repugnant in their doctrines; which, since the beginning of speculation, has divided individuals, nations and ages, rather by their temper and circumstances, than in any proportion to the force of argument. Some philosophical disputes are in truth the forms assumed by antagonist principles in human nature. Among the more remarkable instances of this speculative war, are the controversies between scepticism and dogmatism; between calculation and enthusiasm; and between ethical systems founded on utility; and those in which, under various names, the moral principle is considered as ultimate in theory, as it is unanimously acknowledged to be supreme in practice.

It is possible in speculation to preserve the harmony of these principles, by assigning to each its due rank, and its proper sphere. But, in practice, the irregular variety of events and passions and characters, is perpetually impelling them beyond their end, and driving them without their province. Calm minds and tranquil periods tend towards the one—sensibility and enthusiasm, turbulence and revolution towards the other.—Peculiar conditions of society sometimes exhibit the excess of the one and of the other at the same moment. Thus, under the tyranny of the Emperors, the Roman nobility, according to their various characters, either braved oppression with stoical enthusiasm, or escaped from it into a slightly systematised voluptuousness, which borrowed the name of Epicurus, though it breathed nothing of the spirit of that pure and amiable moralist.

There is no logical tie between the opinions ranged on either side. They are frequently disjoined, and even at variance with each other. They are examples, chosen from many others, of a permanent contest, not indeed of reason, but of the reasoning faculties, with the common feelings of mankind.

The two principles which in one of these controversies have struggled for the ascendant from the time of Epicurus and Zeno, to that of Paley and Kant, are well stated by our philosophical and eloquent author. "The conduct of a man is truly moral, only when he disregards the fortunate or unfortunate consequences of his actions, if these actions be dictated by duty." On the other hand, "The

general laws of nature and of society, place happiness and virtue in harmony with each other." Now the second of these positions is the fundamental principle of the system of utility; and all moralists of every school must assent to the truth of the first. The question is, whether the second, as the first principle of moral theory, be consistent with the first, as an undisputed rule of moral practice. That these two propositions are in some manner reconcilable must be the opinion of Madame de Stael, for she adopts them both, as parts of her moral system.

Do the actions, called moral by all men, agree in the quality of conducing to the general happiness? This is surely a reasonable and important question; and as it relates to a fact which is the subject of universal experience, it must be capable of a satisfactory answer. To this question there can be but one answer. A common quality is then discovered in all moral actions—their general utility.—According to the received rules of philosophising it should seem unnecessary to seek for any further criterion. But whether they have any other qualities in common or not, thus much is certain, that their common quality of utility cannot be overlooked in any just theory of morals, and must on the contrary form an essential principle in such a theory. To advance a step farther, it must be admitted that they are moral acts which, when *singly considered*, are repugnant to the interest of the agent. But it is a proper subject of inquiry, *Whether there be any habitual disposition towards virtuous action, which it is not conducive to*

the happiness of the individual to entertain in such a degree, as to render it impossible for him to prefer an act of vice for its separate advantage?

No philosopher has ever yet ventured to point out such a disposition. Till it be named, we must contend that the point where interest universally coincides with virtue, and where public and private happiness are identified, is discovered—not indeed in single actions, but in those habitual dispositions from which actions flow—it never can be supposed that these principles of general and personal utility, and their co-operation in this manner, are not most momentous parts of an ethical system. Whether they alone are sufficient to afford a moral theory of actions, may still be a proper subject of discussion; but no theory can be formed exclusive of them. Their truth and their importance are perfectly independent of any system respecting the nature and origin of moral approbation, or disapprobation. Though utility should be the criterion of the morality of actions, it by no means follows that moral sentiment should consist only in a perception of that utility. The nature of moral sentiment is a matter of fact to be determined by separate inquiry. The doctrine of utility may be equally applied to actions and dispositions, whether we consider conscience as a modification of reason or of feeling; whether we believe it to be implanted originally in our nature, or only the necessary produce of the action of circumstances common to all men upon the structure of every human mind.

But though the doctrine of utility be perfectly reconcilable with the principles and sentiments of the most disinterested virtue—though the loftiest visions of Plato, and the sternest precepts of Zeno, may be justified by, and even deduced from, the elements of the theory of Epicurus; yet it must not be denied, that in practice there is a hostility hitherto unappeased, between these different regions of the moral world; and that this hostility has been the most powerful, though often the secret cause of the diversity of moral systems.

Those who are accustomed most strongly to feel the necessity of sacrificing advantage to duty in the course of life, naturally, however unreasonably, feel a repugnance to acknowledge, that the rules of duty are founded on any species of advantage, even the most general and refined. Those who constantly contemplate the theoretical dependence of moral rules upon public advantage, may feel a disposition inconsistent with their principles, but favoured by their habits of thinking, to believe that the consideration of advantage may safely impel and guide their actions. The disinterested sentiments of practical virtue seek to establish themselves in the territory of speculation. They are impatient of superiority, though without their own province; and they tend to substitute magnificent names for intelligible principles in scientific morals. On the other hand, it is the natural tendency of the principle of utility, to pass the frontier of theory, within which its dominion is legitimate; and to pervert human life, by substituting a

calculation of the consequences of each action, instead of the inviolable authority of moral rules, and the habitual ardour of virtuous affections.

This warfare perhaps will never be terminated. Opinions, apparently repugnant, may be shown to be consistent; but principles of human nature, so powerful and so adverse, are always likely to be embroiled with each other. The difficulty of a pacification is formidably increased by the very technical terms in every modification of Epicurean ethics. Pleasure, enjoyment, interest, even happiness, are terms which, in their popular import, have a reference to self, and some of them to the lowest portion of self. They have associations with sensuality and sordidness, from which no philosophical definition can purify them. They are used a thousand times in their vulgar sense, for once that they are employed by the refined epicurean. The habits of the mind are necessarily framed according to the most frequent usage. The gross acceptation of the terms steals on the most abstract reasoner, and insensibly affects his views. Hence one class of moralists recoil from the theory, which they find contaminated by such degrading ideas; and another suffer themselves unconsciously to be influenced in their moral sentiments, by the foreign impurities with which the accidents of language have encrusted their elementary notions. If ever a peace should be accomplished between these conflicting principles, it must be by a powerful, and comprehensive, and impartial representation of the whole moral system;—in which the morality of actions, the

motives of conduct, and the nature of moral approbation, are perfectly distinguished from each other;—in which a broad line of demarcation separates theory from practice;—which exhibits general utility, ascertained by calculation, as the basis of moral rules, and the test of virtuous sentiments; but leaves every action to be impelled by sentiment, and controlled by rule, without the toleration of any appeal to utility;—where theoretical principles are expounded with precise simplicity, and active sentiments represented in their natural force and ardour; where every part of human nature is alike exercised and invigorated, where the understandings of philosophers are satisfied, and the hearts of virtuous men moved; where science is protected from being disturbed by enthusiasm, and generous feeling guarded with still greater care from the freezing power of misplaced calculation. All the parts of so noble a representation probably exist in the works of ancient and modern philosophers. But many ineffectual attempts must precede the construction of the magnificent edifice in some distant generation, by a firm and vigorous hand, uninfluenced by the prejudices of speculation or of practice, of sect or of age; and as far as human infirmity will allow, even by the still more subtle and indelible prejudices of personal character.

Of a nature very analogous to this moral contest, is the struggle between prudence and enthusiasm, which pervades human life, and of which one side is maintained in the three last chapters of this work, with affecting and persuasive eloquence. In public

and private life, in literature and art, in legislation and even in religion itself, this dispute is every day reproduced under new forms and names. On this subject, a good understanding between the contending parties is more attainable, though a coincidence between persons of a different temperament and character could never be more than verbal. Madame de Stael herself confounds a calm regard to happiness with that gross selfishness, which, as a vice most destructive to happiness, it is the office of the guardian principle of prudence to eradicate. On the other hand, it is among the calmest suggestions of reason, that wherever great obstacles are to be conquered, a great power must be created. There must therefore be many cases where prudence justifies the cultivation of enthusiasm. It is evident that no prudence could ever produce heroic sacrifices. It never was the interest of the private soldiers of an army to march into a field of battle. It may, indeed, be their duty. But it would be a strange policy, which would prefer a sense of duty in an army, to the enthusiasm of honour or of patriotism. In those ordinary actions of human life which presuppose deliberation, the regard to interest may be generally relied on. In the regular movements of great bodies of men it will maintain its average influence. In whatever must be subjected to uniform rules, it must be extremely considered, because its regularity compensates for its weakness. Other passions overcome or suspend its power; but their return and movements cannot be foreseen or calculated. Prudence is

ever in some degree present, and fills up the vacant place of every exhausted passion. The movements of this principle in pursuit of subsistence and wealth, are so regular, that they have bestowed on political economy the character of an exact science. Its uniform presence, as much as its force, obliges the penal lawgiver to found his sanctions upon it.[1] To this important principle has nature entrusted the protection of society from disorder, and of individuals from daily and hourly waste of their happiness. It guards against evil. To sensibility belongs the privilege of producing what is beautiful and good. From her spring all the affections that sweeten life;—all the sublime exertions of genius;—all the lofty virtues which shed a glory round human nature. Without the one, society could not be preserved;—without the other, it would not be worth preserving. Both are

[1] Probably Madame de Stael has not enough considered those profound and original speculations of Mr. Bentham, which she incidentally controverts. Notwithstanding the unrivalled talent of the editor for clear and lively exposition, they require patient attention. They are the first considerable attempt, to lay the foundations of a system of philosophical jurisprudence. That such a work should be begun and completed by the same man, is not consistent with the slow march of the human understanding. They have, in truth, no connection with the selfish system; nor do they exclude the most disinterested and the most ardent affections from influence over conduct. But upon all possible systems, the lawgiver must calmly regard the general interest of society. The most specious objections to Mr. Bentham have arisen from losing sight of his object, which is to present a calculation of pleasures and pains (from whatever source) as the basis of general rules of law, not as a guide in the deliberation of an individual concerning the morality of each single action.—(See *Edinburgh Review*, vol. iv. p. 13.)

equally indispensable, though not equally dignified parts of the moral order of the world. But, as a coarse and brutish selfishness is the natural vice of the vast majority of men, it seems to be evident, that, in all ordinary circumstances, the excess of prudence is more to be dreaded than that of sensibility. The principles of interest and prudence, have some analogy to those forces in the material world, which are rendered subservient to human skill, because they can be ascertained with absolute precision,—and to those simple laws which govern the regular movements of the grandest bodies in nature.

Those of sentiment and enthusiasm have more analogy to the mighty agents, indiscoverable in their nature, conspicuous and tremendous in their effects, invisible and impalpable, which can neither be numbered, weighed, nor measured ;—of which no man can tell whence they come, or whether they go ; but which produce the most terrible appearances, and preserve the most beneficial conditions of the material universe ;—like the electric power, when its incalculable accumulation and redundance shake the heavens and the earth with tempests ; or like the element, the quality, or the energy which is the unknown cause of heat, which expands matter into those vast bodies of fluid and vapour, which qualify the world to be the habitation of life.

The contest between Scepticism and Dogmatism has a close connection with one of the most interesting parts of this philosophical and eloquent work. The system of *Kant* was one of the efforts of philosophy to

expel the poison of scepticism which Hume had infused into it. That great speculator had not amused himself like Bayle, with dialectical exercises, which only inspire a disposition towards doubt, by displaying the uncertainty of the opinions most generally received. He aimed at proving, not that nothing had been known, but that nothing could be known; and that, from the very structure of the understanding, we were destined to remain in absolute and universal ignorance. It is true, that a system of universal scepticism can never be more than a mere intellectual amusement; an exercise of subtlety, not without its use in humbling the pride of dogmatism. As the dictates of experience, which regulate conduct, must be the object of belief, all objections which attack them in common with the principles of reasoning, must be utterly ineffectual. Whatever attacks every principle of belief, can destroy none. As long as the principles of science are allowed to remain on the same level (be it called certainty or uncertainty) with the maxims of life, the whole system of human conviction must continue undisturbed. When the sceptic boasts of having involved the results of experience, and the elements of geometry, in the same ruin with the doctrines of religion, or the principles of philosophy, he may be answered, that no dogmatist ever claimed more than the same degree of certainty for these various opinions or convictions, and that his scepticism leaves them in that condition. In plain sense, the answer admits no reply. But the system of Kant, and the works of Reid, dissimilar as they are in their form

and spirit, were contemporary and independent attempts to defeat scepticism, by weapons more apparently philosophical. Both these philosophers, in the retirement of Northern Universities, began their scientific labours nearly in the same year, by a discussion of the same question that was agitated between the Leibnitzians and Newtonians about force. In a country like Germany, where the use of a dead language, and the separation of the learned class from society, long preserved the scholastic character and style in philosophy, Kant made a premature attempt to trace every part of science to common principles in the human understanding, with the usual destiny of being often compelled to hide in magnificent expressions an ignorance which ought to be acknowledged; but with prodigious comprehension of mind, and extent of accurate knowledge; with the authoritative and dogmatic tone of a discoverer; with a technical nomenclature, extensive enough to form a new language;—in his moral writings, distinguished by an austere eloquence becoming a teacher of virtue; —in his metaphysical works, characterised by an obscurity which seems, in original thinkers, sometimes to arise from the crowd of ideas struggling for issue; —and, above all, remarkable perhaps beyond any man since Aristotle, for that genius of system which maintains simplicity of principle amidst the greatest variety of matters, and preserves symmetry and correspondence between the most remote parts of the intellectual edifice. In Scotland, where Hutcheson had revived speculative philosophy in a more elegant and popular

form, Reid, a patient observer, and an accurate thinker, with an amiable prepossession in favour of useful and revered opinions, with singular caution, modesty, perspicuity, and elegance, composed his *Inquiry*, on which his fame among philosophers depends; and which is more distinguished, both by originality and error, than his later writings. His language has an unfortunate appearance of appealing to the multitude on the most abstruse subjects of human meditation. He has contributed to render the philosophy of thought more considered as a science of observation. But neither he nor his illustrious followers have sufficiently remembered, that to philosophise is to generalise; that the perfection of science is proportioned to the simplicity of its principles; and that a multiplication of general laws is an avowal of imperfection only better than a groundless boast of perfection. No two writers were ever more unlike; and the disciples of both philosophers will be equally scandalised at the comparison. Yet both were actuated by the same impulse, and aimed at the same end. Long before the appearance of either, a grand defect of the prevalent philosophy had been found by Leibnitz, who of all writers since Bacon most abounds in those fruitful thoughts which arise from a comprehensive glance over the principles of knowledge. The ancient maxim, of which it seems impossible to trace the author, is, "*that there is nothing in the understanding which was not previously in the sense.*" Leibnitz proposed to add to this maxim, "except the understanding itself;—and by

this short addition he spread a new light over intellectual philosophy.—The system of Gassendi, of Hobbes, and of Locke, by the unhappy comparison of the original state of the mind, to blank paper, led its followers to see nothing in the understanding but what came from without.—They did not enough consider, if they considered at all, that the very capacity of receiving impressions must be subject to ascertainable rules; that the human understanding has a structure and functions, and laws of action, which must regulate its perceptions, and render it capable of experience and of reasoning. These laws of the percipient and intellectual nature must plainly be ultimate, and never can be questioned in discussion, because all discussion is founded upon them. The neglect of them opened the way to scepticism. The extensive technical language of Kant, and the unfortunate term *Common Sense*, adopted by Reid, both denote the same ultimate laws of thought which mark the boundaries of reasoning, and against which all disputation is a vain mockery. The number of such laws, and the criterion which distinguishes them, are subjects of important disquisition. But all theories of the understanding must either imply or express their existence. That of Hartley and Condillac attempts to reduce them to *one*,—certainly without success in the present state of knowledge. But if they were reduced to one, that one must be a fact, for the existence of which no proof could be given, and of the nature of which no explanation could be attempted. Whether they were one or a

thousand, the controversy between the Dogmatist and the Sceptic would be precisely of the same nature. Universal scepticism involves a contradiction in terms. It is a belief that there can be no belief. It is an attempt of the mind to act without its structure, and by other laws than those to which nature has subjected its operations. No man can be allowed to be an opponent in reasoning who does not admit those principles, without which, all reasoning is impossible.[1] It is indeed a puerile play, to attempt by argument to establish or confute principles, which every step of the argument necessarily presupposes. —He who labours to establish them, must fall into a vicious circle; and he who attempts to impugn them, into irreconcilable contradiction.

The reasonings of the Pyrrhonians and the Dogmatists, are balanced in a noble passage of Pascal, whose philosophical genius often shines forth with momentary splendour from the thick clouds which usually darkened his great mind. "L'unique fort des Dogmatistes, c'est qu'en parlant de bonne foi et sincerement, on ne peut douter des principes naturels." —"Les principes se sentent, les propositions se concluent."—"Il n'y a jamais eu de Pyrrhonien effectif et parfait."—"La nature soutient la raison impuissante."

He concludes with an observation so remarkable for range of mind, and weight of authority, that it

[1] This is significantly expressed in the quaint title of an old and rare book, "*Sciri sive Sceptices et Scepticorum a jure disputationis Exclusio*," by Thomas White, a personage of some consideration in the history of English philosophy.

seems to us to have a higher character of grandeur than any passage in human composition which has a mere reference to the operations of the understanding.—"La nature confond les Pyrrhoniens, et la Raison les Dogmatistes."

The Edinburgh Review, November 1814.

WAVERLEY; OR, 'TIS SIXTY YEARS SINCE.

In three Volumes, 12*mo*, 1112 *pp. Third Edition. Edinburgh*, 1814.

It is wonderful what genius and adherence to nature will do, in spite of all disadvantages. Here is a thing obviously very hastily, and, in many places, very unskilfully written—composed, one-half of it, in a dialect unintelligible to four-fifths of the reading population of the country—relating to a period too recent to be romantic, and too far gone by to be familiar—and published, moreover, in a quarter of the island where materials and talents for novel-writing have been supposed to be equally wanting; and yet, by the mere force, and truth, and vivacity of its colouring, already casting the whole tribe of ordinary novels into the shade, and taking its place rather with the most popular of our modern poems, than with the rubbish of provincial romances.

The secret of this success, we take it, is merely that the author is a person of genius; and that he has, notwithstanding, had virtue enough to be true to nature throughout, and to content himself, even in

the marvellous parts of his story, with copying from actual existences, rather than from the phantasms of his own imagination. The charm which this communicates to all works that deal in the representation of human actions and characters is more readily felt than understood, and operates with unfailing efficacy even upon those who have no acquaintance with the originals from which the picture has been borrowed. It requires no ordinary talent, indeed, to choose such realities as may outshine the bright imaginations of the inventive, and so to combine them as to produce the most advantageous effect; but when this is once accomplished, the result is sure to be something more firm, impressive, and engaging, than can ever be produced by mere fiction. There is a consistency in nature and truth, the want of which may always be detected in the happiest combinations of fancy; and the consciousness of their support gives a confidence and assurance to the artist, which encourages him occasionally to risk a strength of colouring, and a boldness of drawing, upon which he would scarcely have ventured in a sketch that was purely ideal. The reader, too, who by these or still finer indications, speedily comes to perceive that he is engaged with scenes and characters that are copied from existing originals, naturally lends a more eager attention to the story in which they are unfolded, and regards with a keener interest what he no longer considers as a bewildering series of dreams and exaggerations—but an instructive exposition of human actions and energies, and of all the singular modifications which

our plastic nature receives from the circumstances with which it is surrounded.

The object of the work before us, was evidently to present a faithful and animated picture of the manners and state of society that prevailed in this northern part of the island, in the earlier part of last century; and the author has judiciously fixed upon the era of the Rebellion in 1745, not only as enriching his pages with the interest inseparably attached to the narration of such occurrences, but as affording a fair opportunity for bringing out all the contrasted principles and habits which distinguished the different classes of persons who then divided the country, and formed among them the basis of almost all that was peculiar in the national character. That unfortunate contention brought conspicuously to light, and for the last time, the fading image of feudal chivalry in the mountains, and vulgar fanaticism in the plains; and startled the more polished parts of the land with the wild but brilliant picture of the devoted valour, incorruptible fidelity, patriarchal brotherhood, and savage habits, of the Celtic clans on the one hand,—and the dark, untractable, and domineering bigotry of the Covenanters on the other. Both forms of society had indeed been prevalent in the other parts of the country, —but had there been so long superseded by more peaceable habits, and milder manners, that their vestiges were almost effaced, and their very memory nearly forgotten. The feudal principalities had been extinguished in the south for near three hundred years,—and the dominion of the Puritans from the

time of the Restoration. When the glens of the central Highlands, therefore, were opened up to the gaze of the English, it seemed as if they were carried back to the days of the Heptarchy;—when they saw the array of the west-country Whigs, they might imagine themselves transported to the age of Cromwell. The effect, indeed, is almost as startling at the present moment; and one great source of the interest which the volumes before us undoubtedly possess, is to be sought in the surprise that is excited by discovering that in our own country, and almost in our own age, manners and characters existed, and were conspicuous, which we had been accustomed to consider as belonging to remote antiquity or extravagant romance.

The way in which they are here represented must satisfy every reader, we think, by an inward *tact* and conviction, that the delineation has been made from actual experience and observation;—experience and observation employed perhaps only on a few surviving relics and specimens of what was familiar a little earlier—but generalised from instances sufficiently numerous and complete, to warrant all that may have been added to the portrait.—And indeed the records and vestiges of the more extraordinary parts of the representation are still sufficiently abundant, to satisfy all who have the means of consulting them, as to the perfect accuracy of the picture. The great traits of clannish dependence, pride, and fidelity may still be detected in many districts of the Highlands, though they do not now

adhere to the chieftains when they mingle in general society; and the existing contentions of Burghers, and, Antiburghers and Cameronians, though shrunk into comparative insignificance, and left indeed without protection to the ridicule of the profane, may still be referred to as complete verifications of all that is here stated about Gifted Gilfillan or Ebenezer Cruickshank. The traits of Scottish national character in the lower ranks can still less be regarded as antiquated or traditional; nor is there anything in the whole compass of the work which gives us a stronger impression of the nice observation and graphical talents of the author, than the extraordinary fidelity and felicity with which all the inferior agents in the story are represented. No one who has not lived extensively among the lower orders of all descriptions, and made himself familiar with their various tempers and dialects, can perceive the full merit of those rapid and characteristic sketches; but it requires only a general knowledge of human nature to feel that they must be faithful copies from known originals; and to be aware of the extraordinary facility and flexibility of hand which has touched, for instance, with such discriminating shades, the various gradations of the Celtic character, from the savage imperturbability of Dugald Mahony, who stalks grimly about with his battle-axe on his shoulder without speaking a word to anybody,—to the lively unprincipled activity of Callum Beg,—the coarse, unreflecting hardihood and heroism of Evan Maccombich,—and the pride,

gallantry, elegance and ambition of Fergus himself. In the lower class of the Lowland characters, again, the vulgarity of Mrs. Flockhart and of Lieutenant Jinker is perfectly distinct and original;—as well as the puritanism of Gilfillan and Cruickshank—the atrocity of Mrs. Mucklewrath—and the slow solemnity of Alexander Saunderson. The Baron of Bradwardine, and Bailie Macwheeble, are caricatures no doubt, after the fashion of the caricatures in the novels of Smollett,—or pictures, at the best, of individuals who must always have been unique and extraordinary: but almost all the other personages in the history are fair representatives of classes that are still existing, or may be remembered at least to have existed, by many whose recollections do not extend quite so far back as to the year 1745. We are speaking, however, of the book, as if our readers were already familiar with its contents—and its great popularity perhaps entitles us to do so. But it will be safer, and more decorous, at all events, to preface the extracts we propose to make from it, with a short account of the story.

It is not very skilfully adjusted—though narrated with so much ease and rapidity as to be on the whole very interesting.

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Though in these extracts we have greatly exceeded the limits we usually impose on ourselves with regard to performances of this description,—and trespassed indeed considerably on space which we had reserved for more weighty matters, we have, after all, afforded

but an imperfect specimen of the variety which this work contains.—The gay scenes of the Adventurer's court,—the breaking up of his army from Edinburgh,—the battle of Preston,—and the whole process of his disastrous advance and retreat from the English provinces, are given with the greatest brilliancy and effect;—as well as the scenes of internal disorder and rising disunion that prevail in his scanty army,—the quarrel with Fergus,—and the mystical visions by which that devoted chieftain foresees his disastrous fate. The lower scenes again with Mrs. Flockhart, Mrs. Nosebag, Callum Beg, and the Cumberland peasants, though to some fastidious readers they may appear coarse and disgusting, are painted with a force and a truth to nature, which equally bespeak the powers of the artist, and are incomparably superior to anything of the sort which has been offered to the public for the last sixty years. There are also various copies of verses scattered through the work, which indicate poetical talents of no ordinary description,—though bearing, perhaps still more distinctly than the prose, the traces of considerable carelessness and haste.

The worst part of the book by far is that portion of the first volume which contains the history of the hero's residence in England,—and next to it is the laborious, tardy, and obscure explanation of some puzzling occurrences in the story, which the reader would, in general, be much better pleased to be permitted to forget,—and which are neither well explained after all, nor at all worth explaining. The passages

in which the author speaks in his own person, and assumes the smart and flippant style of modern makers of paragraphs, are also considerably below mediocrity,—and form a strange and humiliating contrast with the force and freedom of his manner when engaged in those dramatic or picturesque representations to which his genius so decidedly inclines.

There has been much speculation, at least in this quarter of the island, about the author of this singular performance,—and certainly it is not easy to conjecture why it is still anonymous.—Judging by internal evidence, to which alone we pretend to have access, we should not scruple to ascribe it to the highest of those authors to whom it has been assigned by the sagacious conjectures of the public;—and this at least we will venture to say, that if it be indeed the work of an author hitherto unknown, Mr. Scott would do well to look to his laurels, and to rouse himself for a sturdier competition than any he has yet had to encounter.

FRANCIS JEFFREY.

The Edinburgh Review, June 1818.

CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE.

CANTO THE FOURTH.

BY LORD BYRON. *8vo*, 257 *pp. London*, 1818.

THERE are two writers, in modern literature, whose extraordinary power over the minds of men, it may be truly said, has existed less in their works than in themselves,—Rousseau and Lord Byron. They have other points of resemblance. Both are distinguished by the most ardent and vivid delineations of intense conception, and by an intense sensibility of passion, rather than of affection. Both, too, by this double power, have held a dominion over the sympathy of their readers, far beyond the range of those ordinary feelings which are usually excited by the mere efforts of genius. The impression of this interest still accompanies the perusal of their writings. But there is another interest of more lasting, and far stronger power, which the one has possessed, and the other now possesses,—which lies in the continual embodying of the individual character,—it might almost be said, of the very person of the writer. When we speak or think of Rousseau or Byron, we are not conscious of speaking or thinking of an author. We have a vague

but empassioned remembrance of men of surpassing genius, eloquence, and power,—of prodigious capacity both of misery and happiness. We feel as if we had transiently met such beings in real life, or had known them in the dim and dark communion of a dream. Each of their works presents, in succession, a fresh idea of themselves; and, while the productions of other great men stand out from them, like something they have created, theirs, on the contrary, are images, pictures, busts of their living selves,—clothed, no doubt, at different times in different drapery, and prominent from a different background, — but uniformly impressed with the same form, and mien, and lineaments, and not to be mistaken for the representations of any other of the children of men.

But this view of the subject, though universally felt to be a true one, requires perhaps a little explanation. The personal character of which we have spoken, it should be understood, is not, altogether, that on which the seal of life has been set,—and to which, therefore, moral approval or condemnation is necessarily annexed, as to the language or conduct of actual existence. It is the character, so to speak, which is prior to conduct, and yet open to good and to ill,—the constitution of the being, in body and in soul. Each of those illustrious writers has, in this light, filled his works with expressions of his own character,—has unveiled to the world the secrets of his own being,—the mysteries of the framing of man. They have gone down into those depths which every man may sound for himself, though not for another,

and they have made disclosures to the world of what they beheld and knew there,—disclosures that have commanded and enforced a profound and universal sympathy, by proving that all mankind, the troubled and the untroubled, the lofty and the low, the strongest and the frailest, are linked together by the bonds of a common but inscrutable nature.

Thus, each of these wayward and richly-gifted spirits has made himself the object of profound interest to the world,—and that too, during periods of society when ample food was everywhere spread abroad for the meditations and passions of men. What love and desire,—what longing and passionate expectation hung upon the voice of Rousseau, the idol of his day!—That spell is broken. We now can regard his works in themselves, in great measure free from all the delusions and illusions that, like the glories of a bright and vapoury atmosphere, were for ever rising up and encircling the image of their wonderful creator. Still is the impression of his works vivid and strong. The charm which cannot pass away is there,—life breathing in dead words,—the pulses of passion,—the thrilling of the frame,—the sweet pleasure stealing from senses touched with ecstasy into sounds which the tongue frames, and the lips utter with delight. All these still are there the fresh beauty the undimmed lustre,—the immortal bloom and verdure and fragrance of life. These, light and vision-like as they seem, endure as in marble. But that which made the spirits of men, from one end of Europe to the other, turn to the name of Rousseau,—

that idolising enthusiasm which we can now hardly conceive, was the illusion of one generation, and has not survived to another. And what was the spell of that illusion? Was it merely that bewitching strain of dreaming melancholy which lent to moral declamation the tenderness of romance? Or that fiery impress of burning sensibility which threw over abstract and subtle disquisitions all the colours of a lover's tale? These undoubtedly,—but not these alone. It was that continual impersonation of himself in his writings, by which he was for ever kept brightly present before the eyes of men. There was in him a strange and unsated desire of depicturing himself, throughout all the changes of his being. His wild temper only found ease in tracing out, in laying bare to the universal gaze, the very ground-work, the most secret paths, the darkest coverts of one of the most wayward and unimaginable minds ever framed by nature. From the moment that his first literary success had wedded him to the public, this was his history,—and such his strange, contradictory, divided life. Shy, and shunning the faces of men in his daily walks, yet searching and rending up the inmost recesses of his heart for the inspection of that race which he feared or hated. As a man, turning from the light, as from something unsupportably loathsome, and plunging into the thickest shades. Yet, in that other existence which he held from imagination, living only in the presence of men,—in the full broad glare of the world's eye,—and eagerly, impetuously, passionately, unsparingly seizing on all his own most hidden

thoughts,—his loneliest moods,—his most sacred feelings,—which had been cherished for the seclusion in which they sprung,—for their own still deep peace,—and for their breathings of unbeheld communions, seizing upon all these, and flinging them out into the open air, that they might feed the curiosity of that eager, idle, frivolous world from which he had fled in misanthropical disgust,—that he might array an exhibition to their greedy gaze,—and that he, the morbid and melancholy lover of solitude, might act a conspicuous and applauded part on the crowded theatre of public fame.

It might, on a hasty consideration, seem to us, that such undisguised revelation of feelings and passions, which the becoming pride of human nature, jealous of its own dignity, would, in general, desire to hold in unviolated silence, could produce in the public mind only pity, sorrow, or repugnance. But, in the case of men of real genius, like Rousseau or Byron, it is otherwise. Each of us must have been aware in himself of a singular illusion, by which these disclosures, when read with that tender or high interest which attaches to poetry, seem to have something of the nature of private and confidential communications. They are not felt, while we read, as declarations published to the world,—but almost as secrets whispered to chosen ears. Who is there that feels, for a moment, that the voice which reaches the inmost recesses of his heart is speaking to the careless multitudes around him? Or, if we do so remember, the words seem to pass by others like air, and to find

their way to the hearts for whom they were intended, —kindred and sympathising spirits, who discern and own that secret language, of which the privacy is not violated though spoken in hearing of the uninitiated, —because it is not understood. There is an unobserved beauty that smiles on us alone; and the more beautiful to us, because we feel as if chosen out from a crowd of lovers. Something analogous to this is felt in the grandest scenes of Nature and Art. Let a hundred persons look from a hill-top over some transcendent landscape. Each will select from the widespread glory at his feet, for his more special love and delight, some different glimpse of sunshine,—or solemn grove,—or embowered spire,—or brown mouldering ruin,—or castellated cloud. During their contemplation, the soul of each man is amidst its own creations, and in the heart of his own solitude;—nor is the depth of that solitude broken, though it lies open to the sunshine, and before the eyes of unnumbered spectators. It is the same in great and impressive scenes of art,—for example in a theatre. The tenderest tones of acted tragedy reach our hearts with a feeling as if that inmost soul which they disclose revealed itself to us alone. The audience of a theatre forms a sublime unity to the actor; but each person sees and feels with the same incommunicated intensity, as if all passed only before his own gifted sight. The publicity which is before our eyes is not acknowledged by our minds; and each heart feels itself to be the sole agitated witness of the pageant of misery.

But there are other reasons why we read with complacency writings which, by the most public declaration of most secret feelings, ought, it might seem, to shock and revolt our sympathy. A great poet may address the whole world in the language of intensest passion, concerning objects of which, rather than speak, face to face, with any one human being on earth, he would perish in his misery. For it is in solitude that he utters what is to be wafted by all the winds of heaven. There are, during his inspiration, present with him only the shadows of men. He is not daunted, or perplexed, or disturbed, or repelled by real living breathing features. He can updraw just as much as he chooses of the curtain that hangs between his own solitude and the world of life. He thus pours his soul out, partly to himself alone,—partly to the ideal abstractions, and impersonated images that float round him at his own conjuration,—and partly to human beings like himself, moving in the dark distance of the every-day world. He confesses himself, not before men, but before the Spirit of Humanity. And he thus fearlessly lays open his heart,—assured that nature never prompted unto genius that which will not triumphantly force its wide way into the human heart. We can thus easily imagine the poet whom, in real life, the countenances and voices of his fellow-men might silence into shame, or fastidiousness, or timidity, or aversion, or disdain,—yet kindling in his solitude into irrepressible passion and enthusiasm towards human nature and all its transitory concerns,—anxiously moulding himself into

the object of men's most engrossing and vehement love or aversion,—identifying his own existence with all their strongest and profoundest passions,—claiming kindred with them, not in their virtues alone, but in their darkest vices and most fatal errors;—yet, in the midst of all this, proudly guarding his own prevailing character, so that it shall not merge in the waves of a common nature, but stand "in shape and gesture proudly eminent," contemplated with still-increasing interest by the millions that, in spite of themselves, feel and acknowledge its strange and unaccountable ascendency.

The reasons then are obvious, why a writer of very vivid sensibilities may, by impassioned self-delineation, hold a wondrous power over the entranced minds of his readers. But this power is in his living hands; and, like the wand of the magician, it loses its virtue on its master's death. We feel chiefly the influence of such a writer, while he lives,—our cotemporary,—going with us a fellow-voyager on the stream of life, and from time to time flashing towards us the emanations of his spirit. Our love,—our expectation follow the courses of his mind, and, if his life repel us not, the courses of his life. It was the strange madness of Rousseau to pour the blaze of his reputation over the scandals of his life. But this was later in his career; and his name for a long time in Europe was that of a hermit-sage, a martyr of liberty and virtue,—a persecuted good man loving a race unworthy of him, and suffering alike from their injustice and from the excess of his own spirit. He

made a character for himself;—and whatever he had made it, it might have been believed. It was an assumed ideal impersonation of a character of literary and philosophical romance. At last, indeed, he broke up his own spell. But if he could have left the delusion behind him, he could not have left the power;—for the power hangs round the living man: it does not rest upon the grave.

When death removes such a writer from our sight, the magical influence of which we have spoken gradually fades away; and a new generation, free from all personal feelings towards the idol of a former age, may perhaps be wearied with that perpetual self-reference which to them seems merely the querulousness or the folly of unhappy or diseased egoism. It is even probable, that they may perversely withhold a portion of just admiration and delight from him who was once the undisputed sovereign of the soul, and that they may show their surprise at the subjection of their predecessors beneath the tyrannical despotism of genius, by scorning themselves to bow before its power, or acknowledge its legitimacy. It is at least certain, that by the darkness of death such luminaries, if not eclipsed, are shorn of their beams. So much, even in their works of most general interest, derives its beauty and fascination from a vivid feeling, in the reader's mind, of its being a portraiture of one with whom he has formed a kind of strange, wild, and disturbed friendship, that they who come after, and have never felt the sorcery of the living man, instead of being kindled up by such pictures into impassioned

wonder and delight, may gaze on them with no stronger emotion than curiosity, and even turn from them with indifference. Such must be more or less the fate of all works of genius, however splendid and powerful, of which the chief interest is not in universal truth, so much as in the intensity of individual feeling, and the impersonation of individual character.

It would, indeed, be in most violent contradiction to all we have formerly written of Lord Byron, were we to say that he stands in this predicament. Yet, there is a certain applicability of our observations even to him, as well as to Rousseau, with whom, perhaps too fancifully, we have now associated his nature and his name. Posterity may make fewer allowances for much in himself and his writings, than his contemporaries are willing to do; nor will they, with the same passionate and impetuous zeal, follow the wild voice that too often leads into a haunted wilderness of doubt and darkness. To them, as to us, there will always be something majestic in his misery,—something sublime in his despair. But they will not, like us, be withheld from sterner and severer feelings, and from the more frequent visitings of moral condemnation, by that awful commiseration and sympathy which a great poet breathes at will into all hearts, from his living agonies,—nor, by that restless, and watchful, and longing anxiety, to see again and again the princely sufferer rising up with fresh confessions of a still more magnificent sorrow,—nor, by that succession of affecting appeals to the frailties and troubles of our own hearts, which now

keeps him vividly, and brightly, in our remembrance, wherever his soul, tempest-like, may have driven him over earth and sea,—nor, above all, by the cheering and lofty hope now felt by them who wish to see genius the inseparable companion of virtue,—that he whose inspiration holds us always in wonder, and so often in delight, may come ere long to breathe a serener atmosphere of thought,—and, after all his wanderings, and all his woes,—with subsided passions, and invigorated intellect, calmly rest at last in the collected majesty of his power.

We are not now writing a formal critique on the genius of Byron, but rather expressing our notions of the relation in which he stands with the lovers of poetry. There is felt to be between him and the public mind a stronger personal bond than ever linked its movements to any other living poet. And we think that this bond will in future be still more closely riveted. During the composition of the first cantos of *Childe Harold*, he had but a confused idea of the character he wished to delineate,—nor did he perhaps very distinctly comprehend the scope and tendencies of his own genius. Two conceptions, distinct from each other, seem therein to be often blended,—one, of ideal human beings, made up of certain troubled powers and passions,—and one, of himself ranging the world of Nature and Man in wonder, and delight, and agitation, in his capacity of a poet. These conceptions, which frequently jostled and interfered with each other, he has since more distinctly unfolded in separate poems. His troubled imaginary beings,—possessing much of

himself, and far more not of himself—he has made into Giaours, Conrads, Laras, and Alps,—and his conception of himself has been expanded into Childe Harold, as we now behold him on that splendid pilgrimage. It is not enough to say that the veil is at last thrown off. It is a nobler creature who is before us. The ill-sustained misanthropy, and disdain of the two first cantos, more faintly glimmer throughout the third, and may be said to disappear wholly from the fourth, which reflects the high and undisturbed visions of earthly glory, as a dark swollen tide images the splendours of the sky in portentous colouring, and broken magnificence.

We have admitted that much of himself is depicted in all his heroes; but when we seem to see the poet shadowed out in all those states of disordered being which such heroes exhibit, we are far from believing that his own mind has gone through those states of disorder, in its own experience of life. We merely conceive of it as having felt within itself the capacity of such disorders, and therefore exhibiting itself before us in possibility. This is not general,—it is rare with great poets. Neither Homer, nor Shakespeare, nor Milton, ever so show themselves in the characters which they portray. Their poetical personages have no reference to themselves; but are distinct, independent creatures of their minds, produced in the full freedom of intellectual power. In Byron there does not seem this freedom of power. There is little appropriation of character to events. Character is first, and all in all. It is dictated,—compelled by

some force in his own mind necessitating him,—and the events obey. These poems, therefore, with all their beauty and vigour, are not, like Scott's poems, full and complete narrations of some one definite story, containing within itself a picture of human life. They are merely bold, confused, and turbulent exemplifications of certain sweeping energies and irresistible passions. They are fragments of a poet's dark dream of life. The very personages, vividly as they are pictured, are yet felt to be fictitious; and derive their chief power over us from their supposed mysterious connection with the poet himself, and, it may be added, with each other. The law of his mind is, to embody his own peculiar feelings in the forms of other men. In all his heroes we accordingly recognise, though with infinite modifications, the same great characteristics, a high and audacious conception of the power of the mind,—an intense sensibility of passion,—an almost boundless capacity of tumultuous emotion,—a haunting admiration of the grandeur of disordered power,—and, above all, a soul-felt, blood-felt delight in beauty,—a beauty which, in his wild creations, is often scared away from the agitated surface of life by stormier passions, but which, like a bird of calm, is for ever returning on its soft, silvery wings, before the black swell has finally subsided into sunshine and peace.

It seems to us, that this exquisite sense of beauty has of late become still more exquisite in the soul of Byron. *Parasina*, the most finished of all his poems, is full of it to overflowing;—it breathes from every

page of the *Prisoners of Chillon*;—but it is in *Manfred* that it riots and revels among the streams and waterfalls, and groves, and mountains, and heavens. Irrelevant and ill-managed as many parts are of that grand drama, there is in the character of *Manfred* more of the self-might of Byron than in all his previous productions. He has therein brought, with wonderful power, metaphysical conceptions into forms,—and we know of no poem in which the aspect of external nature is throughout lighted up with an expression at once so beautiful, solemn, and majestic. It is the poem, next to *Childe Harold*, which we should give to a foreigner to read, that he might know something of Byron. Shakespeare has given to those abstractions of human life and being which are truth in the intellect, forms as full, clear, glowing as the idealised forms of visible nature. The very words of Ariel picture to us his beautiful being. In *Manfred*, we see glorious but immature manifestations of similar power. The poet there creates, with delight, thoughts and feelings and fancies into visible forms, that he may cling and cleave to them, and clasp them in his passion. The beautiful Witch of the Alps seems exhaled from the luminous spray of the Cataract,—as if the poet's eyes, unsated with the beauty of inanimate nature, gave spectral apparitions of loveliness to feed the pure passion of the poet's soul.

We speak of *Manfred* now, because it seems to us to hold a middle place between the Tales of Byron, and *Childe Harold*, as far as regards the Poet himself. But we likewise do so, that we may have an

opportunity of saying a few words on the moral of this poem, and a few words on a subject that may scarcely seem to fall under the legitimate province of the critic, but which, in the case of this great writer, forms so profoundly interesting a part of his poetical character,—we mean, his scepticism.

The moral character of Byron's poetry has often been assailed, and we have ourselves admitted that some strong objections might be urged against it. But we think that his mind is now clearing up, like noon-day, after a stormy and disturbed morning;—and when the change which we anticipate has been fully brought about, the moral character of his poetry will be lofty and pure. Over this fine drama, a moral feeling hangs like a sombrous thunder-cloud. No other guilt but that so darkly shadowed out could have furnished so dreadful an illustration of the hideous aberrations of human nature, however noble and majestic, when left a prey to its desires, its passions and its imagination. The beauty, at one time so innocently adored, is at last soiled, profaned, and violated. Affection, love, guilt, horror, remorse and death come in terrible succession, yet all darkly linked together. We think of Astarte as young, beautiful, innocent,—guilty,—lost,—murdered,—buried,—judged,—pardoned; but still, in her permitted visit to earth, speaking in a voice of sorrow, and with a countenance yet pale with mortal trouble. We had but a glimpse of her in her beauty and innocence; but, at last she rises up before us in all the mortal silence of a ghost, with fixed, glazed, and passionless

eyes, revealing death, judgment, and eternity. The moral breathes and burns in every word,—in sadness, misery, insanity, desolation and death. The work is "instinct with spirit,"—and in the agony and distraction, and all its dimly imagined causes, we behold, though broken up, confused and shattered, the elements of a purer existence.

On the other point, namely, the dark and sceptical spirit prevalent through the works of this poet, we shall not now utter all that we feel, but rather direct the notice of our readers to it as a singular phenomenon in the poetry of the age. Whoever has studied the spirit of Greek and Roman literature, must have been struck with the comparative disregard and indifference wherewith the thinking men of these exquisitely polished nations, contemplated those subjects of darkness and mystery which afford, at some period or other of his life, so much disquiet,—we had almost said so much agony, to the mind of every reflecting modern. It is difficult to account for this in any very satisfactory, and we suspect altogether impossible to do so in any strictly logical, manner. In reading the works of Plato and his interpreter Cicero, we find the germs of all the doubts and anxieties to which we have alluded, so far as these are connected with the workings of our reason. The singularity is, that those clouds of darkness, which hang over the intellect, do not appear, so far as we can perceive, to have thrown at any time any very alarming shade upon the feelings or temper of the ancient sceptic. We should think a very great deal

of this was owing to the brilliancy and activity of his southern fancy. The lighter spirits of antiquity, like the more mercurial of our moderns, sought refuge in mere *gaieté du cœur* and derision. The graver poets and philosophers,—and poetry and philosophy were in those days seldom disunited,—built up some airy and beautiful system of mysticism, each following his own devices, and suiting the erection to his own peculiarities of hope and inclination; and this being once accomplished, the mind appears to have felt quite satisfied with what it had done, and to have reposed amidst the splendours of its sand-built fantastic edifice, with as much security as if it had been grooved and riveted into the rock of ages. The mere exercise of ingenuity in devising a system, furnished consolation to its creators or improvers. Lucretius is a striking example of all this; and it may be averred that, down to the time of Claudian, who lived in the fourth century of our era, in no classical writer of antiquity do there occur any traces of what moderns understand by the restlessness and discomfort of uncertainty as to the government of the world, and the future destinies of Man.

There are three only, even among the great poets of modern times, who have chosen to depict, in their full shape and vigour, those agonies to which great and meditative intellects are, in the present progress of human history, exposed by the eternal recurrence of a deep and discontented scepticism. But there is only one who has dared to represent himself as the victim of these nameless and undefinable sufferings.

Goethe chose for his doubts and his darkness the terrible disguise of the mysterious Faustus. Schiller, with still greater boldness, planted the same anguish in the restless, haughty, and heroic bosom of Wallenstein. But Byron has sought no external symbol in which to embody the inquietudes of his soul. He takes the world, and all that it inherit, for his arena and his spectators; and he displays himself before their gaze, wrestling unceasingly and ineffectually with the demon that torments him. At times there is something mournful and depressing in his scepticism; but oftener, it is of a high and solemn character, approaching to the very verge of a confiding faith. Whatever the poet may believe, we his readers always feel ourselves too much ennobled and elevated even by his melancholy, not to be confirmed in our own belief by the very doubts so majestically conceived and uttered. His scepticism, if it ever approaches to a creed, carries with it its refutation in its grandeur. There is neither philosophy nor religion in those bitter and savage taunts which have been cruelly thrown out, from many quarters, against those moods of mind which are involuntary, and will not pass away;—the shadows and spectres which still haunt his imagination, may once have disturbed our own;—through his gloom there are frequent flashes of illumination;—and the sublime sadness which, to him, is breathed from the mysteries of mortal existence, is always joined with a longing after immortality, and expressed in language that is itself divine.

But it is our duty now to give our readers an

analysis of the concluding Canto of *Childe Harold;* and as it is, in our opinion, the finest of them all, our extracts shall be abundant. The poem which it brings to an end is perhaps the most original in the language, both in conception and execution. It is no more like Beattie's *Minstrel* than *Paradise Lost*, — though the former production was in the noble author's mind when first thinking of *Childe Harold.* A great poet, who gives himself up free and unconfined to the impulses of his genius, as Byron has done in the better part of this singular creation, shows to us a spirit as it is sent out from the hands of Nature, to range over the earth and the societies of men. Even Shakespeare himself submits to the shackles of history and society. But here Byron traverses the whole earth, borne along by the whirlwind of his own spirit. Wherever a forest frowns, or a temple glitters,—there he is privileged to bend his flight. He may suddenly start up from his solitary dream by the secret fountain of the desert, and descend at once into the tumult of peopled, or the silence of desolated cities. Whatever lives now,—has perished heretofore,—or may exist hereafter,—and that has within in it a power to kindle passion, may become the material of his all-embracing song. There are no unities of time or place to fetter him,—and we fly with him from hill-top to hill-top, and from tower to tower, over all the solitude of nature, and all the magnificence of art. When the past pageants of history seem too dim and faded, he can turn to the splendid spectacles that have dignified our own days;

and the images of kings and conquerors of old may give place to those yet living in sovereignty or exile. Indeed, much of the power which Harold holds over us is derived from this source. He lives in a sort of sympathy with the public mind,—sometimes wholly distinct from it,—sometimes acting in opposition to it,—sometimes blending with it,—but at all times,—in all his thoughts and actions having a reference to the public mind. His spirit need not go back into the past,—though it often does so,—to bring the objects of its love back to earth in more beautiful life. The existence he paints is,—now. The objects he presents are marked out to him by men's present regards. It is his to speak of all those great political events which have been objects of such passionate sympathy to the nation. And when he does speak of them, he either gives us back our own feelings, raised into powerful poetry, or he endeavours to displace them from our breasts, and to substitute others of his own. In either case, it is a living speaker standing up before us, and ruling our minds. But chiefly he speaks of our own feelings, exalted in thought, language, and passion. The whole substance and basis of his poem is therefore popular. All the scenes through which he has travelled, were, at the very moment, of strong interest to the public mind, and that interest still hangs over them. His travels were not, at first, the self-impelled act of a mind severing itself in lonely roaming from all participation with the society to which it belonged, but rather obeying the general motion of the mind of that society. The southern

regions of Europe have been like a world opening upon us with fresh and novel beauty, and our souls have enjoyed themselves there, of late years, with a sort of romantic pleasure. This fanciful and romantic feeling was common to those who went to see those countries, and to those who remained at home, to hear the narrations of the adventurers,—so that all the Italian, Grecian, Peninsular, Ionian, and Ottoman feeling which pervades *Childe Harold,* singularly suited as it is to the genius of Byron, was not first brought upon the English mind by the power of that genius, but was there already in great force and activity.

There can be no limits set to the interest that attaches to a great poet thus going forth, like a spirit, from the heart of a powerful and impassioned people, to range among the objects and events to them most pregnant with passion,—who is, as it were, the representative of our most exalted intellect,—and who often seems to disclose within ourselves the splendour with which he invests our own ordinary conceptions. The consciousness that he is so considered by a great people, must give a kingly power and confidence to a poet. He feels himself entitled, and, as it were, elected to survey the phenomena of the times, and to report upon them in poetry. He is the speculator of the passing might and greatness of his own generation. But though he speaks to the public, at all times, he does not consider them as his judges. He looks upon them as sentient existences that are important to his poetical existence,—but, so

that he command their feelings and passions, he cares not for their censure or their praise,—for his fame is more than mere literary fame; and he aims in poetry, like the fallen chief whose image is so often before him, at universal dominion, we had almost said, universal tyranny, over the minds of man.

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The *Pilgrimage of Childe Harold* has now been brought to its close; and of his character there remains nothing more to be laid open to our view. It is impossible to reflect on the years which have elapsed since this mysterious stranger was first introduced to our acquaintance, without feeling that our own spirits have undergone in that time many mighty changes,—sorrowful in some it may be, in others happy changes. Neither can we be surprised, knowing as we well do who Childe Harold is, that he also has been changed. He represented himself, from the beginning, as a ruin; and when we first gazed upon him, we saw indeed in abundance the black traces of recent violence and convulsion. The edifice has not been rebuilt; but its hues have been sobered by the passing wings of time, and the calm slow ivy has had leisure to wreathe the soft green of its melancholy among the fragments of the decay. In so far, the Pilgrim has become wiser. He seems to think more of others, and with a greater spirit of humanity. There was something tremendous, and almost fiendish, in the air with which he surveyed the first scenes of his wanderings; and no proof of the strength of genius was ever exhibited so strong and unquestionable,

as the sudden and entire possession of the minds of Englishmen by such a being as he then appeared to be. He looked upon a bull-fight, and a field of battle, with no variety of emotion. Brutes and men were, in his eyes, the same blind, stupid victims of the savage lust of power. He seemed to shut his eyes to everything of that citizenship and patriotism which ennobles the spirit of the soldier, and to delight in scattering the dust and ashes of his derision over all the most sacred resting-places of the soul of man.

Even then, we must allow, the original spirit of the Englishman and the poet broke triumphantly, at times, through the chilling mist in which it had been spontaneously enveloped. In Greece, above all, the contemplation of Athens, Salamis, Marathon, Thermoplæ and Platæa, subdued the prejudices of him who had gazed unmoved upon the recent glories of Trafalgar and Talavera. The nobility of manhood appeared to delight this moody visitant; and he accorded, without reluctance, to the shades of long-departed heroes that reverent homage, which, in the strange mixture of envy and scorn wherewith the contemplative so often regard active men, he had refused to the living, or to the newly dead.

At all times, however, the sympathy and respect of Childe Harold,—when these have been excited by any circumstances external to himself,—have been given almost exclusively to the intellectual, and refused to the moral greatness of his species. There is certainly less of this in his last Canto. Yet we think that the ruins of Rome might have excited within him not a

few glorious recollections, quite apart from those vague lamentations and worshippings of imperial power, which occupy so great a part of the conclusion of his pilgrimage. The stern purity and simplicity of domestic manners,—the devotion of male and female bosoms,—the very names of Lucretia, Valeria, and the mother of the Gracchi, have a charm about them at least as enduring as any others, and a thousand times more delightful than all the iron memories of conquerors and consuls.—But the mind must have something to admire,—some breathing-place of veneration,—some idol, whether of demon or of divinity, before which it is its pride to bow. Byron has chosen too often to be the undoubting adorer of Power. The idea of tyrannic and unquestioned sway seems to be the secret delight of his spirit. He would pretend, indeed, to be a republican,—but his heroes are all stamped with the leaden signet of despotism; and we sometimes see the most cold, secluded, immitigable tyrant of the whole, lurking beneath the "scallop-shell and sandal-shoon" of the Pilgrim himself.

In every mien and gesture of this dark being, we discover the traces of one that has known the delights, and sympathised with the possessors of intellectual power; but too seldom any vestiges of a mind that delights in the luxuries of quiet virtue, or that could repose itself in the serenity of home. The very possession of purity would sometimes almost seem to degrade, in his eyes, the intellectual greatness with which it has been sometimes allied. He speaks of

Pompey with less reverence than Cæsar; and, in spite of many passing visitings of anger and of scorn, it is easy to see that, of all cotemporary beings, there is ONE only with whom he is willing to acknowledge mental sympathy,—one only whom he looks upon with real reverence,—one only whose fortunes touch the inmost sanctuaries of his proud soul,—and that this one is no other than that powerful, unintelligible, unrivalled spirit, who, had he possessed either private virtue or public moderation, might still have been in a situation to despise the offerings of even such a worshipper as Harold.

But there would be no end of descanting on the character of the Pilgrim, nor of the moral reflections which it awakens. Of the poet himself, the completion of this wonderful performance inspires us with a lofty and magnificent hope. It is most assuredly in his power to build up a work that shall endure among the most august fabrics of the genius of England. Indeed, the impression which the collective poetry of our own age makes upon our minds, is, that it contains great promise of the future; and that, splendid as many of its achievements have been, some of our living poets seem destined still higher to exalt the imaginative character of their countrymen. When we look back and compare the languid, faint, cold delineations of the very justest and finest subjects of inspiration, in the poetry of the first half of the last century, with the warm, life-flushed and life-breathing pictures of our own, we feel that a great accession has been made to the literature of our day,—an accession

not only of delight, but of power. We cannot resist the persuasion, that if literature, in any great degree, impresses and nourishes the character of a people,—then this literature of ours, pregnant as it is with living impressions,—gathered from Nature in all her varieties of awfulness and beauty,—gathered too from those high and dread passions of men, which our ordinary life scarcely shows, and indeed could scarcely bear, but which, nevertheless, have belonged, and do belong, to our human life,—and held up in the powerful representations of the poets to our consciousness at times, when the deadening pressure of the days that are going by might bereave us of all genial hope and all dignified pride,—we say it is impossible for us to resist the belief that such pregnant, glowing, powerful poetry, must carry influences into the heart of this generation, even like those which are breathed from the heart of Nature herself,—or like those which lofty passions leave behind them in bosoms which they have once possessed. The same spirit of poetical passion which so uniformly marks the works of all our living poets, must exist very widely among those who do not aspire to the name of genius; it must be very widely diffused throughout the age, and, as we think, must very materially influence the reality of life. Yet highly as we estimate the merits of our modern poetry, it is certain, that the age has not yet produced any one great epic or tragic performance. Vivid and just delineations of passion there are in abundance,—but of moments of passions,—fragments of representation. The giant grasp of thought, which

conceives, and brings into full and perfect life, full and perfect passion,—passion pervading alike action and character, through a majestic series of events, and at the same time cast in the mould of grand imagination, —this seems not to be of our age. In the delineation of external nature, which, in a poet's soul, requires rather moral beauty than intellectual strength, this age has excelled. But it has produced no poem gloriously illustrative of the agencies, existences, and events, of the complex life of man. It has no Lear,—no Macbeth,—no Othello. Some such glory as this Byron may yet live to bring over his own generation. His being has in it all the elements of the highest poetry. And that being he enjoys in all the strength of its prime. We might almost say, that he needs but to exercise his will to construct a great poem. There is, however, much for him to alter in what may be called his Theory of Imagination respecting Human Life. Some idols of his own setting-up he has himself overthrown. There are yet some others, partly of gold, and partly of clay, which should be dashed against the floor of the sanctuary. We have already spoken of his personal character, as it shines forth in his poetry. This personal character exists in the nature of his imagination and may therefore be modified,—purified,—dignified by his own will. His imagination does, to his own eyes, invest him with an unreal character. Purposes, passions, loves, deeds, events, may seem great and paramount in imagination, which have yet no power to constrain to action: and those which perhaps may govern our actions, vanish

altogether from our imagination. There is a region,—a world,—a sphere of being in imagination, which, to our real life, is no more than the world of a dream ; yet, long as we are held in it by the transport of our delusion, we live, not in delight only, but in the conscious exaltation of our nature. It is in this world that the spirit of Byron must work a reformation for itself. He knows, far better than we can tell him, what have been the most hallowed objects of love and of passion to the souls of great poets in the most splendid eras of poetry,—and he also knows well, that those objects, if worshipped by him with becoming and steadfast reverence, will repay the worship which they receive, by the more fervent and divine inspiration which they kindle.

The Edinburgh Review, July 1832.

CORN-LAW RHYMES.

1. Third Edition, 8vo. London, 1831.
2. Love: a Poem. By the Author of Corn-Law Rhymes. Third Edition, 8vo. London, 1831.
3. The Village Patriarch: a Poem. By the Author of Corn-Law Rhymes. 12mo. London, 1831.

SMELFUNGUS REDIVIVUS, throwing down his critical assaying-balance, some years ago, and taking leave of the Belles-Lettres function, expressed himself in this abrupt way: "The end having come, it is fit that we end. Poetry having ceased to be read, or published, or written, how can it continue to be reviewed? With your Lake Schools, and Border-Thief Schools, and Cockney, and Satanic Schools, there has been enough to do; and now, all these Schools having burnt or smouldered themselves out, and left nothing but a widespread wreck of ashes, dust, and cinders, —or perhaps dying embers, kicked to and fro under the feet of innumerable women and children in the Magazines, and at best blown here and there into transient sputters, with vapour enough, so as to form what you might name a boundless Green-sick, or

New-Sentimental, or Sleep-Awake School, — what remains but to adjust ourselves to circumstances? Urge me not," continues the able Editor, suddenly changing his figure, "with considerations that Poetry, as the inward voice of Life, must be perennial, only dead in one form to become alive in another; that this still abundant deluge of Metre, seeing there must needs be fractions of Poetry floating scattered in it, ought still to be net-fished, at all events, surveyed and taken note of: the survey of English Metre, at this epoch, perhaps transcends the human faculties; to hire out the reading of it, by estimate, at a remunerative rate per page, would, in few quarters, reduce the cash-box of any extant Review to the verge of insolvency."

What our distinguished contemporary has said remains said. Far be it from us to censure or counsel any able Editor; to draw aside the Editorial veil, and, officiously prying into his interior mysteries, impugn the laws he walks by! For Editors, as for others, there are times of perplexity, wherein the cunning of the wisest will scantily suffice his own wants, say nothing of his neighbour's.

To us, on our side, meanwhile, it remains clear that Poetry, or were it but Metre, should nowise be altogether neglected. Surely it is the Reviewer's trade to sit watching, not only the tillage, crop-rotation, marketings, and good or evil husbandry of the Economic Earth, but also the weather-symptoms of the Literary Heaven, on which those former so much depend: if any promising or threatening

meteoric phenomenon make its appearance, and he proclaim not tidings thereof, it is at his peril. Further, be it considered how, in this singular poetic epoch, a small matter constitutes a novelty. If the whole welkin hang overcast in drizzly dinginess, the feeblest light-gleam, or speck of blue, cannot pass unheeded.

The Works of this Corn-Law Rhymer we might liken rather to some little fraction of a rainbow: hues of joy and harmony, painted out of troublous tears. No round full bow, indeed; gloriously spanning the Heavens; shone on by the full sun; and, with seven-striped, gold-crimson border (as is in some sort the office of Poetry) dividing Black from Brilliant: not such; alas, still far from it! Yet, in very truth, a little prismatic blush, glowing genuine among the wet clouds; which proceeds, if you will, from a sun cloud-hidden, yet indicates that a sun does shine, and above those vapours a whole azure vault and celestial firmament stretch serene.

Strange as it may seem, it is nevertheless true, that here we have once more got sight of a Book calling itself Poetry, yet which actually is a kind of Book, and no empty pasteboard case, and simulacrum or "ghost-defunct" of a Book, such as is too often palmed on the world, and handed over Booksellers' counters, with a demand of real money for it, as if it too were a reality. The speaker here is of that singular class, who have something to say; whereby, though delivering himself in verse, and in these days, he does not deliver himself wholly in jargon, but

articulately, and with a certain degree of meaning, that has been *believed*, and therefore is again believable.

To some the wonder and interest will be heightened by another circumstance: that the speaker in question is not school-learned, or even furnished with pecuniary capital; is, indeed, a quite unmonied, russet-coated speaker; nothing or little other than a Sheffield worker in brass and iron, who describes himself as "one of the lower, little removed above the lowest class." Be of what class he may, the man is provided, as we can perceive, with a rational god-created soul; which too has fashioned itself into some clearness, some self-subsistence, and can actually see and know with its own organs; and in rugged substantial English, nay, with tones of poetic melody, utter forth what it has seen.

It used to be said that lions do not paint, that poor men do not write; but the case is altering now. Here is a voice coming from the deep Cyclopean forges, where Labour, in real soot and sweat, beats with his thousand hammers "the red son of the furnace," doing personal battle with Necessity, and her dark brute Powers, to make them reasonable and serviceable; an intelligible voice from the hitherto Mute and Irrational, to tell us at first hand how it is with him, what in very deed is the theorem of the world and of himself, which he, in those dim depths of his, in that wearied head of his, has put together. To which voice, in several respects significant enough, let good ear be given.

Here too be it premised, that nowise under the

category of "Uneducated Poets," or in any fashion of dilettante patronage, can our Sheffield friend be produced. His position is unsuitable for that; so is ours. Genius, which the French lady declared to be of no sex, is much more certainly of no rank; neither when "the spark of Nature's fire" has been imparted, should Education take high airs in her artificial light,—which is too often but phosphorescence and putrescence. In fact, it now begins to be suspected here and there, that this same aristocratic recognition, which looks down with an obliging smile from its throne, of bound Volumes and gold Ingots, and admits that it is wonderfully well for one of the uneducated classes, may be getting out of place. There are unhappy times in the world's history, when he that is the least educated will chiefly have to say that he is the least perverted; and with the multitude of false eye-glasses, convex, concave, green, even yellow, has not lost the natural use of his eyes. For a generation that reads Cobbett's Prose, and Burns's Poetry, it need be no miracle that here also is a man who can handle both pen and hammer like a man.

Nevertheless, this serene-highness attitude and temper is so frequent, perhaps it were good to turn the tables for a moment, and see what look it has under that reverse aspect. How were it if we surmised, that for a man gifted with natural vigour, with a man's character to be developed in him, more especially if in the way of Literature, as Thinker and Writer, it is actually, in these strange days, no special misfortune to be trained up among the Uneducated

classes, and not among the Educated; but rather of two misfortunes the smaller?

For all men doubtless obstructions abound; spiritual growth must be hampered and stunted, and has to struggle through with difficulty, if it do not wholly stop. We may grant too that, for a mediocre character, the continual training and tutoring, from language-masters, dancing-masters, posture-masters of all sorts, hired and volunteer, which a high rank in any time and country assures, there will be produced a certain superiority, or at worst, air of superiority, over the corresponding mediocre character of low rank: thus we perceive, the vulgar Do-nothing, as contrasted with the vulgar Drudge, is in general a much prettier man; with a wider perhaps clearer outlook into the distance; in innumberable superficial matters, however it may be when we go deeper, he has a manifest advantage. But with the man of uncommon character, again, in whom a germ of irrepressible Force has been implanted, and *will* unfold itself into some sort of freedom,—altogether the reverse may hold. For such germs, too, there is, undoubtedly enough, a proper soil where they will grow best, and an improper one where they will grow worst. True, also, where there is a will, there is a way; where a genius has been given, a possibility, a certainty of its growing is also given. Yet often it seems as if the injudicious gardening and manuring were worse than none at all; and killed what the inclemencies of blind chance would have spared. We find accordingly that few Fredericks or Napoleons, indeed none since the

Great Alexander, who unfortunately drank himself to death too soon for proving what lay in him, were nursed up with an eye to their vocation ; mostly with an eye quite the other way, in the midst of isolation and pain, destitution and contradiction. Nay, in our own times, have we not seen two men of genius, a Byron and a Burns : they both, by mandate of Nature, struggle and must struggle towards clear Manhood, stormfully enough, for the space of six-and-thirty years ; yet only the gifted Ploughman can partially prevail therein ; the gifted Peer must toil, and strive, and shoot out in wild efforts, yet die at last in Boyhood, with the promise of his Manhood still but announcing itself in the distance. Truly, as was once written, " It is only the artichoke that will not grow except in gardens : the acorn is cast carelessly abroad into the wilderness, yet on the wild soil it nourishes itself, and rises to be an oak." All woodmen, moreover, will tell you that fat manure is the ruin of your oak ; likewise that the thinner and wilder your soil, the tougher, more iron-textured is your timber,—though, unhappily, also the smaller. So too with the spirits of men : they become pure from their errors by suffering for them ; he who has battled, were it only with Poverty and hard toil, will be found stronger, more expert, than he who could stay at home from the battle, concealed among the Provision-waggons, or even not unwatchfully "abiding by the stuff." In which sense, an observer, not without experience of our time, has said : " Had I a man of clearly developed character (clear, sincere within its limits), of insight,

courage, and real applicable force of head and of heart, to search for; and not a man of luxuriously distorted character, with haughtiness for courage, and for insight and applicable force, speculation and plausible show of force,—it were rather among the lower than among the higher classes that I should look for him."

A hard saying, indeed, seems this same: that he, whose other wants were all beforehand supplied; to whose capabilities no problem was presented except even this, How to cultivate them to the best advantage, should attain less real culture than he whose first grand problem and obligation was nowise spiritual culture, but hard labour for his daily bread! Sad enough must the perversion be, where preparations of such magnitude issue in abortion; and a so sumptuous Art with all its appliances can accomplish nothing, not so much as necessitous Nature would of herself have supplied! Nevertheless, so pregnant is Life with evil as with good; to such height in an age rich, plethorically overgrown with means, can means be accumulated in the wrong place, and immeasurably aggravate wrong tendencies, instead of righting them, this sad and strange result may actually turn out to have been realised.

But what, after all, is meant by *uneducated*, in a time when Books have come into the world; come to be household furniture in every habitation of the civilised world? In the poorest cottage are Books; is one BOOK, wherein for several thousands of years the spirit of man has found light, and nourishment,

and an interpreting response to whatever is Deepest in him; wherein still, to this day, for the eye that will look well, the Mystery of Existence reflects itself, if not resolved, yet revealed, and prophetically emblemed; if not to the satisfying of the outward sense, yet to the opening of the inward sense, which is the far grander result. "In Books lie the creative Phœnix-ashes of the whole Past." All that men have devised, discovered, done, felt or imagined, lies recorded in Books; wherein whoso has learned the mystery of spelling printed letters, may find it, and appropriate it.

Nay, what indeed is all this? As if it were by universities, and libraries, and lecture-rooms, that man's Education, what we can call Education, were accomplished; solely, or mainly, by instilling the dead letter and record of other men's Force, that the living Force of a new man were to be awakened, enkindled, and purified into victorious clearness! Foolish Pedant, that sittest there compassionately descanting on the Learning of Shakespeare! Shakespeare had penetrated into innumerable things; far into Nature with her divine Splendours and infernal Terrors, her Ariel Melodies and mystic mandragora Moans; far into man's workings with Nature, into man's Art and Artifice: Shakespeare knew (*kenned*, which in those days still partially meant can-ned) innumerable things; what men are, and what the world is, and how and what men aim at there, from the Dame Quickly of modern Eastcheap to the Cæsar of ancient Rome, over many countries, over many centuries; of all this he

had the clearest understanding and constructive comprehension; all this was his Learning and Insight; what now is thine? Insight into none of those things; perhaps strictly considered, into no thing whatever; solely into thy own sheepskin diplomas, fat academic honours, into vocables and alphabetic letters, and but a little way into these!—The grand result of schooling is a mind with just vision to discern, with free force to do: the grand schoolmaster is Practice.

And now, when *kenning* and *can-ning* have become two altogether different words; and this, the first principle of human culture, the foundation-stone of all but false imaginary culture, That men must, before every other thing, be trained to *do* somewhat, has been, for some generations, laid quietly on the shelf, with such result as we see,—consider what advantage those same uneducated Working classes have over the educated Unworking classes, in one particular: herein, namely, that they *must* work. To work! What incalculable sources of cultivation lie in that process, in that attempt; how it lays hold of the whole man, not of a small theoretical calculating fraction of him, but of the whole practical, doing, and daring, and enduring man; thereby to awaken dormant faculties, root out old errors, at every step! He that has done nothing has known nothing. Vain is it to sit scheming and plausibly discoursing: up and be doing! If thy knowledge be real, put it forth from thee: grapple with real Nature; try thy theories there, and see how they hold out. *Do* one thing, for the first time in thy life do a thing; a new light will

rise to thee on the doing of all things whatsoever. Truly, a boundless significance lies in work: whereby the humblest craftsman comes to attain much, which is of indispensable use, but which he who is of no craft, were he never so high, runs the risk of missing. Once turn to Practice, Error and Truth will no longer consort together: the result of Error involves you in the square-root of a negative quantity; try to *extract* it, or any earthly substance or sustenance from it, if you will! The honourable Member can discover that "there is a reaction," and believe it, and wearisomely reason on it, in spite of all men, while he so pleases, for still his wine and his oil will not fail him: but the sooty Brazier, who discovered that brass was green-cheese, has to act on his discovery; finds therefore that, singular as it may seem, brass cannot be masticated for dinner, green-cheese will not beat into fire-proof dishes; that such discovery, therefore, has no legs to stand on, and must even be let fall. Now, take this principle of difference through the entire lives of two men, and calculate what it will amount to! Necessity, moreover, which we here see as the mother of Accuracy, is well known as the mother of Invention. He who wants every thing, must know many things, do many things, to procure even a few: different enough with him, whose indispensable knowledge is this only, that a finger will pull the bell!

So that, for all men who live, we may conclude, this Life of Man is a school, wherein the naturally foolish will continue foolish though you bray him in a mortar, but the naturally wise will gather wisdom under

every disadvantage. What, meanwhile, must be the condition of an Era, when the highest advantages there become perverted into drawbacks; when, if you take two men of genius, and put the one between the handles of a plough, and mount the other between the painted coronets of a coach-and-four, and bid them both move along, the former shall arrive a Burns, the latter a Byron: two men of talent, and put the one into a Printer's chapel, full of lamp-black, tyrannous usage, hard toil, and the other into Oxford universities, with lexicons and libraries, and hired expositors and sumptuous endowments, the former shall come out a Dr. Franklin, the latter a Dr. Parr!

However, we are not here to write an Essay on Education, or sing *misereres* over a "world in its dotage:" but simply to say that our Corn-Law Rhymer, educated or uneducated as Nature and Art have made him, asks not the smallest patronage or compassion for his Rhymes, professes not the smallest contrition for them. Nowise in such attitude does he present himself; not supplicatory, deprecatory, but sturdy, defiant, almost menacing. Wherefore, indeed, should he supplicate or deprecate? It is out of the abundance of the heart that he has spoken; praise or blame cannot make it truer or falser than it already is. By the grace of God this man is sufficient for himself; by his skill in metallurgy can beat out a toilsome but a manful living, go how it may; has arrived too at that singular audacity of believing what he knows, and acting on it, or writing on it, or thinking on it, without leave asked of any one: there shall he stand,

and work, with head and with hand, for himself and the world; blown about by no wind of doctrine; frightened at no Reviewer's shadow; having, in his time, looked substances enough in the face, and remained unfrightened.

What is left, therefore, but to take what he brings, and as he brings it? Let us be thankful, were it only for the day of small things. Something it is that we have lived to welcome once more a sweet Singer wearing the likeness of a Man. In humble guise, it is true, and of stature more or less marred in its development; yet not without a genial robustness, strength and valour built on honesty and love; on the whole, a genuine man, with somewhat of the eye, and speech, and bearing that beseems a man. To whom all other genuine men, how different soever in subordinate particulars, can gladly hold out the right hand of fellowship.

The great excellence of our Rhymer, be it understood then, we take to consist even in this, often hinted at already, that he *is genuine*. Here is an earnest, truth-speaking man; no theoriser, sentimentaliser, but a practical man of work and endeavour, man of suffrance and endurance. The thing that he speaks is not a hearsay, but a thing which he has himself known, and by experience become assured of. He has used his eyes for seeing; uses his tongue for declaring what he has seen. His voice, therefore among the many noises of our Planet, will deserve its place better than the most; will be well worth some attention. Whom else should we attend to but such?

The man who speaks with some half shadow of a Belief, and supposes, and inclines to think; and considers not with undivided soul, what is true, but only what is plausible, and will find audience and recompense; do we not meet him at every street-turning, on all highways and byways; is he not stale, unprofitable, ineffectual, wholly grown a weariness of the flesh? So rare is his opposite in any rank of Literature, or of Life, so very rare, that even in the lowest he is precious. The authentic insight and experience of any human soul, were it but insight and experience in hewing of wood and drawing of water, is real knowledge, a real possession and acquirement, how small soever: *palabra*, again, were it a supreme pontiff's, is wind merely, and nothing, or less than nothing. To a considerable degree, this man, we say, has worked himself loose from cant, and conjectural halfness, idle pretences and hallucinations, into a condition of Sincerity. Wherein perhaps, as above argued, his hard social environment, and fortune to be "a workman born," which brought so many other retardations with it, may have forwarded and accelerated him.

That a man, Workman or Idleman, encompassed, as in these days, with persons in a state of willing or unwilling Insincerity, and necessitated, as man is, to learn whatever he does traditionally learn by *imitating* these, should nevertheless shake off Insincerity, and struggle out from that dim pestiferous marsh-atmosphere, into a clearer and purer height,—betokens in him a certain originality; in which rare gift Force of all kinds is pre-supposed. To our

Rhymer, accordingly, as hinted more than once, vision and determination have not been denied; a rugged, home-grown understanding is in him; whereby, in his own way, he has mastered this and that, and looked into various things, in general honestly and to purpose, sometimes deeply, piercingly, and with a Seer's eye. Strong thoughts are not wanting, beautiful thoughts; strong and beautiful expressions of thought. As traceable for instance in this new illustration of an old argument, the mischief of Commercial Restrictions:

"These, O ye quacks, these are your remedies:
Alms for the Rich, a bread-tax for the Poor!
Soul-purchased harvests on the indigent moor!—
Thus the winged victor of a hundred fights,
The warrior Ship, bows low her banner'd head,
When through her planks the seaborn reptile bites
Its deadly way;—and sinks in ocean's bed,
Vanquish'd by worms. What then? The worms were fed.—
Will not God smite thee black, thou whited wall?
Thy life is lawless, and thy law a lie,
Or Nature is a dream unnatural:
Look on the clouds, the streams, the earth, the sky;
Lo, all is interchange and harmony!
Where is the gorgeous pomp which, yester morn,
Curtain'd yon Orb, with amber, fold on fold?
Behold it in the blue of Rivelin, borne
To feed the all-feeding sea! the molten gold
Is flowing pale in Loxley's waters cold,
To kindle into beauty tree and flower,
And wake to verdant life hill, vale, and plain.
Cloud trades with river, and exchange is power:
But should the clouds, the streams, the winds disdain
Harmonious intercourse, nor dew nor rain

Would forest-crown the mountains : airless day
Would blast on Kinderscout the heathy glow;
No purply green would meeken into grey
O'er Don at eve; no sound of river's flow
Disturb the Sepulchre of all below."

Nature and the doings of men have not passed by this man unheeded, like the endless cloud-rack in dull weather; or lightly heeded, like a theatric phantasmagoria : but earnestly enquired into, like a thing of reality ; reverently loved and worshipped, as a thing with divine significance in its reality, glimpses of which divineness he has caught and laid to heart. For his vision, as was said, partakes of the genuinely Poetical ; he is not a Rhymer and Speaker only, but, in some genuine sense, something of a Poet.

Further we must admit him, what indeed is already herein admitted, to be, if clear-sighted, also brave-hearted. A troublous element is his ; a Life of painfulness, toil, insecurity, scarcity, yet he fronts it like a man ; yields not to it, tames it into some subjection, some order : its wild fearful dinning and tumult, as of a devouring Chaos, becomes a sort of wild war-music for him ; wherein too are passages of beauty, of melodious softness, of lightness and briskness, even of joy. The stout heart is also a warm and kind one ; Affection dwells with Danger, all the holier and the lovelier for such stern environment. A working man is this ; yet, as we said, a man : in his sort, a courageous, much-loving, faithfully enduring and endeavouring man.

What such a one, so gifted and so placed, shall say

to a Time like ours, how he will fashion himself into peace, or war, or armed neutrality, with the world and his fellow-men, and work out his course in joy and grief, in victory and defeat, is a question worth asking; which in these three little Volumes partly receives answer. He has turned, as all thinkers up to a very high and rare order in these days must do, into Politics; is a Reformer, at least a stern Complainer, Radical to the heart: his poetic melody takes an elegiaco-tragical character; much of him is converted into Hostility, and grim, hardly-suppressed Indignation, such as Right long denied, Hope long deferred, may awaken in the kindliest heart. Not yet as a rebel against anything does he stand; but as a free man, and the spokesman of free men, not far from rebelling against much; with sorrowful appealing dew, yet also with incipient lightning, in his eyes; whom it were not desirable to provoke into rebellion. He says, in Vulcanic dialect, his feelings have been *hammered* till they are *cold-short;* so they will no longer bend; "they snap, and fly off,"—in the face of the hammerer. Not unnatural, though lamentable! Nevertheless, under all disguises of the Radical, the Poet is still recognisable; a certain music breathes through all dissonances, as the prophecy and ground-tone of returning harmony; the man, as we said, is of a poetical nature.

To his Political Philosophy there is perhaps no great importance attachable. He feels, as all men that live must do, the disorganisation, and hard-grinding unequal pressure of the Social Affairs; but

sees into it only a very little further than far inferior men do. The frightful condition of a Time, when public and private Principle, as the word was once understood, having gone out of sight, and Self-interest being left to plot, and struggle, and scramble, as it could and would, Difficulties had accumulated till they were no longer to be borne, and the Spirit that should have fronted and conquered them seemed to have forsaken the world;—when the Rich, as the utmost they could resolve on, had ceased to govern, and the Poor, in their fast-accumulating numbers, and ever-widening complexities, had ceased to be able to do without governing; and now the plan of "*Competition*" and "*Laissez-faire*" was, on every side, approaching its consummation; and each bound up in the circle of his own wants and perils, stood grimly distrustful of his neighbour, and the distracted Common-weal was a Common-woe, and to all men it became apparent that the end was drawing nigh:—all this black aspect of Ruin and Decay, visible enough, experimentally known to our Sheffield friend, he calls by the name of "Corn-Law," and expects to be in good part delivered from, were the accursed Bread-tax repealed.

In this system of political Doctrine, even as here so emphatically set forth, there is not much novelty. Radicals we have many; loud enough on this and other grievances; the removal of which is to be the one thing needful. The deep, wild flood of Bitterness, and Hope becoming hopeless, lies acrid, corrosive in every bosom; and flows fiercely enough through any

orifice Accident may open: through Law Reform, Legislative Reform, Poor Laws, want of Poor Laws, Tithes, Game Laws, or, as we see here, Corn Laws. Whereby indeed only this becomes clear, that a deep, wide flood of evil does exist and corrode; from which, in all ways, blindly and seeingly, men seek deliverance, and cannot rest till they find it; least of all till they know what part and proportion of it is to *be* found. But with us foolish sons of Adam this is ever the way; some evil that lies nearest us, be it a chronic sickness, or but a smoky chimney, is ever the acme and sum-total of all evil; the black hydra that shuts us out from a Promised Land: and so, in poor Mr. Shandy's fashion, must we "shift from trouble to trouble, and from side to side; button up one cause of vexation, and unbutton another."

Thus for our keen-hearted singer, and sufferer, has "the Bread-tax," in itself a considerable but no immeasurable smoke-pillar, swoln out to be a world-embracing Darkness, that darkens and suffocates the whole Earth, and has blotted out the heavenly stars. Into the merit of the Corn Laws, which has often been discussed, in fit season, by competent hands, we do not enter here; least of all in the way of argument, in the way of blame, towards one who, if he read such merit with some emphasis "on the scantier trenchers of his children," may well be pardoned. That the "Bread-tax," with various other taxes, may ere long be altered and abrogated, and the Corn Trade become as free as the poorest "bread-taxed drudge" could wish it, "or the richest satrap bread-tax-fed" could

fear it, seems no extravagant hypothesis: would that the mad Time could, by such simple hellebore-dose, be healed! Alas, for the diseases of a "world lying in wickedness," in heart-sickness and atrophy, quite another alcahest is needed;—a long, painful course of medicine and regimen, surgery and physic, not yet specified or indicated in the Royal-College Books!

But if there is little novelty in our friend's Political Philosophy, there is some in his political Feeling and Poetry. The peculiarity of this Radical is, that with all his stormful destructiveness, he combines a decided loyalty and faith. If he despise and trample under foot on the one hand, he exalts and reverences on the other: the "landed pauper in his coach-and-four" rolls all the more glaringly, contrasted with the "Rockinghams and Savilles" of the past, with "the Lansdowns and Fitzwilliams," many a "Wentworth's lord," still "a blessing" to the present. This man, indeed, has in him the root of all reverence,—a principle of Religion. He believes in a Godhead, not with the lips only, but apparently with the heart; who, as has been written, and often felt, "reveals Himself in Parents, in all true Teachers, and Rulers,"—as in false Teachers and Rulers quite Another may be revealed! Our Rhymer, it would seem, is no Methodist: far enough from it. He makes "the Ranter," in his hot-headed way, exclaim over

> "The Hundred Popes of England's Jesuitry;"

and adds, by way of note, in his own person, some still stronger sayings: How "this baneful corporation,"

"dismal as its Reign of Terror is, and long-armed its Holy Inquisition, must condescend to learn and teach what is useful, or go where all nuisances go." As little perhaps is he a Churchman; the "Cadi-Dervish" being nowise to his mind. Scarcely, however, if at all, does he show aversion to the Church as Church; or, among his many griefs, touch upon Tithes as one. But, in any case, the black colours of Life, even as here painted, and brooded over, do not hide from him that a God is the Author and Sustainer thereof; that God's world, if made a House of Imprisonment, can also be a House of Prayer; wherein for the weary and heavy-laden, Pity and Hope are not altogether cut away.

It is chiefly in virtue of this inward temper of heart, with the clear disposition and adjustment which for all else results therefrom, that our Radical attains to be Poetical; that the harsh groanings, contentions, upbraidings, of one who unhappily has felt constrained to adopt such mode of utterance, become ennobled into something of music. If a land of bondage, this is still his Father's land, and the bondage endures not for ever. As worshipper and believer, the captive can look with seeing eye: the aspect of the Infinite Universe still fills him with an Infinite feeling; his chains, were it but for moments, fall away; he soars free aloft, and the sunny regions of Poesy and Freedom gleam golden afar on the widened horizon. Gleamings, we say, prophetic dawnings from those far regions, spring up for him; nay, beams of actual radiance. In his ruggedness, and dim contractedness

(rather of place than of organ), he is not without touches of a feeling and vision, which even in the stricter sense, is to be named poetical.

One deeply poetical idea, above all others, seems to have taken hold of him: the idea of Time. As was natural to a poetic soul, with few objects of Art in its environment, and driven inward, rather than invited outward, for occupation. This deep mystery of ever-flowing Time; "bringing forth," and as the Ancients wisely fabled, "devouring" what it has brought forth; rushing on, on, *in* us, yet above us, all uncontrollable by us; and under it, dimly visible athwart it, the bottomless Eternal;—this is, indeed, what we may call the primary idea of Poetry; the first that introduces itself into the poetic mind. As here:

"The bee shall seek to settle on his hand,
But from the vacant bench haste to the moor,
Mourning the last of England's high-soul'd Poor,
And bid the mountains weep for Enoch Wray.
And for themselves,—albeit of things that last
Unalter'd most; for they shall pass away
Like Enoch, though their iron roots seem fast,
Bound to the eternal future as the past:
The Patriarch died; and they shall be no more!
Yes, and the sailless worlds, which navigate
The unutterable Deep that hath no shore,
Will lose their starry splendour soon or late,
Like tapers, quench'd by Him, whose will is fate!
Yes, and the Angel of Eternity,
Who numbers worlds and writes their names in light,
One day, O Earth, will look in vain for thee,
And start and stop in his unerring flight,
And with his wings of sorrow and affright,
Veil his impassion'd brow and heavenly tears!"

And not the first idea only, but the greatest, properly the parent of all others. For if it can rise in the remotest ages, in the rudest states of culture, wherever an "inspired thinker" happens to exist, it connects itself with all great things; with the highest results of new Philosophy, as of primeval Theology; and for the Poet, in particular, is as the life-element wherein alone his conceptions can take poetic form, and the whole world become miraculous and magical.

> "We *are such stuff*
> As Dreams are made on; and our little life
> Is rounded with a Sleep!"

Figure that, believe that, O Reader; then say whether the *Arabian Tales* seem wonderful!—"Rounded with a sleep (*mit Schlaf umgeben*)" says Jean Paul; "these three words created whole volumes in me."

To turn now on our worthy Rhymer, who has brought us so much, and stingily insist on his errors and shortcomings, were no honest procedure. We had the whole poetical encyclopædia to draw upon, and say commodiously, Such and such an item is not here; of which encyclopædia the highest genius can fill but a portion. With much merit, far from common in his time, he is not without something of the faults of his time. We praised him for originality; yet is there a certain remainder of imitation in him; a tang of the Circulating Libraries, as in Sancho's wine, with its key and thong, there was a tang of iron and leather. To be reminded of Crabbe, with his truthful severity of

style, in such a place, we cannot object; but what if there were a slight bravura dash of the fair tuneful Hemans? Still more, what have we to do with Byron, and his fierce vociferous mouthings, whether "passionate," or not passionate and only theatrical? King Cambyses' vein is, after all, but a worthless one; no vein for a wise man. Strength, if that be the thing aimed at, does not manifest itself in spasms, but in stout bearing of burdens. Our Author says, "It is too bad to exalt into a hero the coxcomb who would have gone into hysterics if a tailor had laughed at him." Walk not in his footsteps, then, we say, whether as hero or as singer; repent a little, for example, over somewhat in that fuliginous, blue-flaming, pitch-and-sulphur *Dream of Enoch Wray*, and write the next otherwise.

We mean no imitation in a bad palpable sense; only that there is a tone of such occasionally audible; which ought to be removed;—of which, in any case, we make not much. Imitation is a leaning on something foreign; incompleteness of individual development, defect of free utterance. From the same source, spring most of our Author's faults; in particular, his worst, which after all is instrinsically a defect of manner. He has little or no Humour. Without Humour of character he cannot well be; but it has not yet got to utterance. Thus, where he has mean things to deal with, he knows not how to deal with them; oftenest deals with them more or less meanly. In his vituperative prose Notes, he seems embarrassed; and but ill hides his embarrassment,

under an air of predetermined sarcasm, of knowing briskness, almost of vulgar pertness. He says, he cannot help it; he is poor, hard-worked, and "soot is soot." True, indeed; yet there is no connection between Poverty and Discourtesy; which latter originates in Dulness alone. Courtesy is the due of Man to Man; not of suit of clothes to suit of clothes. He who could master so many things, and make even Corn-Laws rhyme, we require of him this further thing,—bearing worthy of himself, and of the order he belongs to,—the highest and most ancient of all orders, that of manhood. A pert snappishness is no manner for a brave man; and then the manner so soon influences the matter; a far worse result. Let him speak wise things, and speak them wisely; which latter may be done in many dialects, grave and gay, only in the snappish seldom or never.

The truth is, as might have been expected, there is still much lying in him to be developed; the hope of which development it were rather sad to abandon. Why, for example, should not his view of the world, his knowledge of what is and has been in the world, indefinitely extend itself? Were he merely the "uneducated Poet," we should say, he had read largely; as he is not such, we say, Read still more, much more largely. Books enough there are in England, and of quite another weight and worth than that circulating-library sort; may be procured too, may be read, even by a hard-worked man; for what man (either in God's service or the Devil's, as himself chooses it) is not hard-worked? But here again, where

there is a will there is a way. True, our friend is no longer in his teens; yet still, as would seem, in the vigour of his years: we hope too that his mind is not finally shut in, but of the improvable and enlargeable sort. If Alfieri (also kept busy enough, with horse-breaking and what not) learned Greek after he was fifty, why is the Corn-Law Rhymer too old to learn?

However, be in the future what there may, our Rhymer has already done what was much more difficult, and better than reading printed Books;—looked into the great prophetic-manuscript Book of Existence, and read little passages there. Here, for example, is a sentence tolerably spelled:

> "Where toils the Mill by ancient woods embraced,
> Hark, how the cold steel screams in hissing fire!
> Blind Enoch sees the Grinder's wheel no more,
> Couch'd beneath rocks and forests, that admire
> Their beauty in the waters, ere they roar,
> Dash'd in white foam the swift circumference o'er.
> There draws the Grinder his laborious breath;
> There coughing at his deadly trade he bends:
> Born to die young, he fears nor man nor death;
> Scorning the future, what he earns he spends;
> 'Debauch and riot are his bosom friends.'
> Behold his failings! Hath he virtues too?
> He is no Pauper, blackguard though he be:
> Full well he knows what minds combined can do,
> Full well maintains his birthright: he is free,
> And, frown for frown, outstares monopoly.
> Yet Abraham and Elliot both in vain
> Bid science on his cheek prolong the bloom:
> He will *not* live! He seems in haste to gain
> The undisturb'd asylum of the tomb,
> And, old at two-and-thirty, meets his doom!"

Or this, "of Jem, the rogue avowed,

> "'Whose trade is Poaching! Honest Jem works not,
> Begs not, but thrives by plundering beggars here.
> Wise as a lord, and quite as good a shot,
> He, like his betters, lives in hate and fear,
> And feeds on partridge because bread is dear.
> Sire of six sons apprenticed to the jail,
> He prowls in arms, the Tory of the night;
> With them he shares his battles and his ale,
> With him they feel the majesty of might,
> No Despot better knows that Power is Right.
> Mark his unpaidish sneer, his lordly frown;
> Hark how he calls the beadle and flunkey liars;
> See how magnificently he breaks down
> His neighbour's fence, if so his will requires,
> And how his struttle emulates the squire's!'
> Jem rises with the Moon; but when she sinks,
> Homeward with sack-like pockets, and quick heels,
> Hungry as boroughmongering gowl, he slinks.
> He reads not, writes not, thinks not; scarcely feels;
> Steals all he gets; serves Hell with all he steals!"

It is rustic, rude existence; barren moors, with the smoke of Forges rising over the waste expanse. Alas, no Arcadia; but the actual dwelling-place of actual toil-grimed sons of Tubal Cain: yet are there blossoms and the wild natural fragrance of gorse and broom; yet has the Craftsman pauses in his toil; the Craftsman too has an inheritance in Earth; and even in Heaven.

> "Light! All is not corrupt, for thou art pure,
> Unchanged and changeless. Though frail man is vile,
> Thou look'st on him, serene, sublime, secure,
> Yet, like thy Father, with a pitying smile.

Even on this wintry day, as marble cold,
Angels might quit their home to visit thee,
And match their plumage with thy mantle roll'd
Beneath God's Throne, o'er billows of a sea,
Whose isles are World's, whose bounds Infinity.
Why then is Enoch absent from my side?
I miss the rustle of his silver hair;
A guide no more, I seem to want a guide,
While Enoch journeys to the house of prayer;
Ah, ne'er came Sabbath-day but he was there!
Lo, how, like him, erect and strong, tho' grey,
Yon village tower tome-touched to God appeals!
And hark! the chimes of morning die away:
Hark! to the heart the solemn sweetness steals.
Like the heart's voice, unfelt by none who feels
That God is Love, that Man is living Dust;
Unfelt by none whom ties of brotherhood
Link to his kind; by none who puts his trust
In naught of Earth that hath survived the flood,
Save those mute charities, by which the good
Strengthen poor worms, and serve their Maker best."

"Hail Sabbath! Day of mercy, peace, and rest!
Thou o'er loud cities throw'st a noiseless spell,
The hammer there, the wheel, the saw molest
Pale Thought no more: o'er Trade's contentious hell
Meek Quiet spreads her wings invisible.
And when thou com'st less silent are the fields,
Thro' whose sweet paths the toil-freed townsman steals.
To him the very air a banquet yields.
Envious he watches the poised hawk that wheels
His flight on chainless winds. Each cloud reveals
A paradise of beauty to his eye.
His little Boys are with him, seeking flowers,
Or chasing the too-venturous gilded fly.
So by the daisy's side he spends the hours,
Renewing friendship with the budding bowers:

> And while might, beauty, good without alloy,
> Are mirror'd in his children's happy eyes,—
> In His great Temple offering thankful joy
> To Him, the infinitely Great and Wise,
> With soul attuned to Nature's harmonies,
> Serene and cheerful as a sporting child,—
> His *heart* refuses to believe that man
> Could turn into a hell the blooming wild,
> The blissful country where his childhood ran
> A race with infant rivers, ere began"—

—"King-humbling" bread-tax, "blind Misrule," and enough else.

And so our Corn-Law Rhymer plays his part. In this wise, does he indite and act his Drama of Life, which for him is all too Domestic-Tragical. It is said, "the good actor soon makes us forget the bad theatre, were it but a barn; while, again nothing renders so apparent the badness of the bad actor as a theatre of peculiar excellence." How much more in a theatre and drama such as these of Life itself! One other item, however, we must note in that ill-decorated Sheffield theatre: the back-scene and bottom-decoration of it all; which is no other than a Workhouse. Alas, the Workhouse is the bourne whither all these actors and workers are bound; whence none that has once passed it returns! A bodeful sound, like the rustle of approaching world-devouring tornadoes, quivers through their whole existence; and the voice of it is, Pauperism! The thanksgiving they offer up to Heaven is, that they are not yet Paupers; the earnest cry of their prayer is, that "God would shield them from the bitterness of Parish Pay."

Mournful enough, that a white European Man must pray wistfully for what the horse he drives is sure of, —That the strain of his whole faculties may not fail to earn him food and lodging. Mournful that a gallant manly spirit, with an eye to discern the world, a heart to reverence it, a hand cunning and willing to labour in it, must be haunted with such a fear. The grim end of it all, Beggary! A soul loathing, what true souls ever loathe, Dependence, help from the unworthy to help; yet sucked into the world-whirlpool,—able to do no other: the highest in man's heart struggling vainly against the lowest in man's destiny! In good truth, if many a sickly and sulky Byron, or Byronlet, glooming over the woes of existence, and how unworthy God's Universe is to have so distinguished a resident, could transport himself into the patched coat and sooty apron of a Sheffield Blacksmith, made with as strange faculties and feelings as he, made by God Almighty all one as he was,—it would throw a light on much for him.

Meanwhile, is it not frightful as well as mournful to consider how the widespread evil is spreading wider and wider? Most persons, who have had eyes to look with, may have verified, in their own circle, the statement of this Sheffield Eye-witness, and "from their own knowledge and observation fearlessly declare that the little master-manufacturer," that the working man generally, "is in a much worse condition than he was in twenty-five years ago." Unhappily, the fact is too plain; the reason and scientific necessity of it is too plain. In this state of things, every new man is a

new misfortune; every new market a new complexity; the chapter of chances grows ever more incalculable; the hungry gamesters (whose stake is their life) are ever increasing in numbers; the world-movement rolls on: by what method shall the weak and help-needing, who has none to help him, withstand it? Alas, how many brave hearts, ground to pieces in that unequal battle, have already sunk; in every sinking heart, a Tragedy, less famous than that of the Sons of Atreus; wherein, however, if no "kingly house," yet a manly house, went to the dust, and a whole manly "lineage was swept away." Must it grow worse and worse "till the last brave heart is broken in England; and this same 'brave Peasantry'" has become a kennel of wild-howling ravenous Paupers? God be thanked! There is some feeble shadow of hopes that the change may have begun while it was yet time. You may lift the pressure from the free man's shoulders, and bid him go forth rejoicing; but lift the slave's burden, he will only wallow the more composedly in his sloth: a nation of degraded men cannot be raised up, except by what we rightly name a miracle.

Under which point of view also, these little Volumes, indicating such a character in such a place, are not without significance. One faint symptom perhaps that clearness will return, that there is a possibility of its return. It is as if from that Gehenna of Manufacturing Radicalism, from amid its loud roaring and cursing, whereby nothing became feasible, nothing knowable, except this only, that misery and malady

existed there, we heard now some manful tone of reason and determination, wherein alone can there be profit, or promise of deliverance. In this Corn-Law Rhymer we seem to trace something of the antique spirit; a spirit which had long become invisible among our working as among other classes; which here, perhaps almost for the first time, reveals itself in an altogether modern political vesture. "The Pariahs of the Isle of Woe," as he passionately names them, are no longer Pariahs if they have become Men. Here is one man of their tribe; in several respects a true man; who has abjured Hypocrisy and Servility, yet not therewith trodden Religion and Loyalty under foot; not without justness of insight, devoutness, peaceable heroism of resolve; who, in all circumstances, even in these strange ones, will be found quitting himself like a man. One such that has found a voice: who knows how many mute but not inactive brethren he may have in his own and in all other ranks? Seven thousand that have not bowed the knee to Baal! These are the men, wheresoever found, who are to stand forth in England's evil day, on whom the hope of England rests. For it has been often said, and must often be said again, that all Reform except a moral one will prove unavailing. Political Reform, pressingly enough wanted, can indeed root out the weeds (gross deep-fixed lazy dock-weeds, poisonous obscene hemlocks, ineffectual spurry in abundance); but it leaves the ground *empty*,—ready either for noble fruits, or for new worse tares! And how else is a Moral Reform

to be looked for but in this way, that more and more Good Men are, by a bountiful Providence, sent hither to disseminate Goodness; literally to *sow* it, as in seeds shaken abroad by the living tree? For such, in all ages and places, is the nature of a Good Man; he is ever a mystic creative centre of Goodness; his influence, if we consider it, is not to be measured; for his works do not die, but being of Eternity, are eternal; and in new transformation, and ever-wider diffusion, endure, living and life-giving. Thou who exclaimest over the horrors and baseness of the Time, and how Diogenes would now need *two* lanterns in daylight, think of this; over the Time thou hast no power; to redeem a World sunk in dishonesty has not been given thee; solely over one man therein thou hast a quite absolute uncontrollable power; him redeem, him make honest; it will be something, it will be much, and thy life and labour not in vain.

We have given no epitomised abstract of these little Books, such as is the Reviewer's wont: we would gladly persuade many a reader, high and low, who takes interest not in rhyme only, but in reason, and the condition of his fellow-man, to purchase and peruse them for himself. It is proof of an innate love of worth, and how willingly the Public, did not thousand-voiced Puffery so confuse it, would have to do with substances, and not with deceptive shadows, that these Volumes carry "Third Edition" marked on them,—on all of them but the newest, whose fate with the reading world we yet know not; which, however,

seems to deserve not worse but better than either of its forerunners.

Nay, it appears to us as if in this humble chant of the *Village Patriarch* might be traced rudiments of a truly great idea; great though all undeveloped. The Rhapsody of *Enoch Wray* is, in its nature, and unconscious tendency, Epic; a whole world lies shadowed in it. What we might call an inarticulate, half-audible Epic! The main figure is a blind aged man; himself a ruin, and encircled with the ruin of a whole Era. Sad and great does that image of a universal Dissolution hover visible as a poetic background. Good Old Enoch! He could do so much, was so wise, so valiant. No Ilion had he destroyed; yet somewhat he had built up: where the Mill stands noisy by its cataract, making corn into bread for men, it was Enoch that reared it, and made the rude rocks send it water; where the mountain Torrent now boils in vain, and is mere passing music to the traveller, it was Enoch's cunning that spanned it with that strong Arch, grim, time-defying. Where Enoch's hand or mind has been, Disorder has become Order; Chaos has receded some little hand-breadth; must give up some new hand-breadth of his realm. Enoch too has seen his followers fall round him (by stress of hardship, and the arrows of the gods), has performed funeral games for them, and raised sandstone memorials, and carved his *Abiit ad Plures* thereon, with his own hand. The living chronicle and epitome of a whole century; when he departs, a whole century will become dead, historical.

Rudiments of an Epic, we say; and of the true Epic of our Time,—were the genius but arrived that could sing it! Not "Arms and the Man"; "Tools and the Man," that were now our Epic. What indeed are Tools, from the Hammer and Plummet of Enoch Wray to this Pen we now write with, but Arms, wherewith to do battle against UNREASON without or within, and smite in pieces not miserable fellow-men, but the Arch Enemy that makes us all miserable; henceforth the only legitimate battle!

Which Epic, as we granted, is here altogether imperfectly sung; scarcely a few notes thereof brought freely out; nevertheless with indication, with prediction that it will be sung. Such is the purport and merit of the *Village Patriarch;* it struggles towards a noble utterance, which however it can nowise find. Old Enoch is from the first, speechless, heard of rather than heard or seen; at best, mute, motionless like a stone pillar of his own carving. Indeed, to find fit utterances for such meaning as lies struggling here is a problem, to which the highest poetic minds may long be content to accomplish only approximate solutions. Meanwhile, our honest Rhymer, with no guide but the instinct of a clear natural talent, has created and adjusted somewhat, not without vitality of union; has avoided somewhat the road to which lay open enough. His *Village Patriarch*, for example, though of an elegiac strain, is not wholly lachrymose, not without touches of rugged gaiety;—is like Life itself, with tears and toil, with laughter and rude play,

such as metallurgic Yorkshire sees it;—in which sense, that wondrous Courtship of the sharp-tempered, oft-widowed Alice Green may pass, questionable, yet with a certain air of soot-stained genuineness. And so has, not a Picture, indeed, yet a sort of genial Study or Cartoon come together for him; and may endure there, after some flary oil-daubings, which we have seen framed with gilding, and hung up in proud galleries, have become rags and rubbish.

To one class of readers especially, such Books as these ought to be interesting;—to the highest, that is to say, the richest class. Among our Aristocracy, there are men, we trust there are many men, who feel that they also are workmen, born to toil, ever in their great Taskmaster's eye, faithfully with heart and head for those that with heart and hand do, under the same great Taskmaster, toil for them;—who have even this noblest and hardest work set before them,—To deliver out of that Egyptian bondage to Wretchedness, and Ignorance, and Sin, the hard-handed millions, of whom this hard-handed, earnest witness, and writer, is here representative. To such men his writing will be as a Document, which they will lovingly interpret: what is dark and exasperated and acrid, in their humble Brother, they for themselves will enlighten and sweeten; taking thankfully what is the real purport of his message, and laying it earnestly to heart. Might an instructive relation, and interchange between High and Low, at length ground itself, and more and more perfect itself; to

the unspeakable profit of all parties; for if all parties are to love and help one another, the first step towards this, is that all thoroughly understand one another. To such rich men an authentic message from the hearts of poor men, from the heart of one poor man, will be welcome.

To another class of our Aristocracy, again, who unhappily feel rather that they are *not* workmen; and profess not so much to bear any burden, as to be themselves, with utmost attainable *steadiness*, and if possible, *gracefulness*, borne,—such a phenomenon as this of the Sheffield Corn-Law Rhymer, with a Manchester Detrosier, and much else, pointing the same way, will be quite unwelcome; indeed, to the clearer-sighted, astonishing and alarming. It indicates that they find themselves, as Napoleon was wont to say, "in a new position;"—a position wonderful enough; of extreme singularity; to which, in the whole course of History, there is perhaps but one case in some measure parallel. The case alluded to stands recorded in the Book of Numbers: the case of Balaam the son of Beor. Truly, if we consider it, there are few passages more notable and pregnant in their way, than this of Balaam. The Midianitish Soothsayer (Truth-speaker, or as we should now say, Counsel-giver and Senator) is journeying forth, as he has from of old quite prosperously done, in the way of his vocation; not so much to "curse the people of the Lord," as to earn for himself a comfortable penny by such means as are possible and expedient; something, it is hoped, midway between cursing and blessing;

which shall not, except in case of necessity, be either a curse or a blessing, or anything so much as a Nothing that will look like a Something and bring wages in. For the man is not dishonest; far from it: still less is he honest; but above all things, he is, has been, and will be, respectable. Did calumny ever dare to fasten itself on the fair fame of Balaam? In his whole walk and conversation, has he not shown consistency enough; ever doing and speaking the thing that was decent; with proper spirit, maintaining his status: so that friend and opponent must often compliment him, and defy the spiteful world to say, Herein art thou a Knave? And now as he jogs along, in official comfort, with brave official retinue, his heart filled with good things, his head with schemes for the suppression of Vice, and the Cause of civil and religious Liberty all over the world;—consider what a spasm, and life-clutching, ice-taloned pang, must have shot through the brain and pericardium of Balaam, when his Ass not only on the sudden stood stock-still, defying spur and cudgel, but—*began to talk*, and that in a reasonable manner! Did not his face, elongating, collapse, and tremor occupy his joints? For the thin crust of Respectability has cracked asunder; and a bottomless preternatural Inane yawns under him instead. Farewell, a long farewell to all my greatness! the spirit-stirring Vote, the ear-piercing Hear; the big Speech that makes ambition virtue; soft Palm-greasing first of raptures, and Cheers that emulate sphere-music: Balaam's occupation's gone!—

As for our stout Corn-Law Rhymer, what can we say by way of valediction but this,—Well done; come again, doing better? Advices enough there were; but all lie included under one,—To keep his eyes open, and do honestly whatsoever his hand shall find to do. We have praised him for sincerity; let him become more and more sincere; casting out all remnants of Hearsay, Imitation, ephemeral Speculation; resolutely "*clearing* his mind of Cant." We advised a wider course of reading: would he forgive us if we now suggested the question, Whether Rhyme is the only dialect he can write in; whether Rhyme is, after all, the natural or fittest dialect for him? In good Prose, which differs inconceivably from bad Prose, what may not be written, what may not be read; from a Waverley Novel, to an Arabic Koran, to an English Bible! Rhyme has plain advantages; which, however, are often purchased too dear. If the inward Thought *can* speak for itself, and not sing itself, let it, especially in these quite unmusical days, do the former. In any case, if the outward Phrase is a timber-toned, false matter we could well dispense with. Will our Rhymer consider himself then; and decide for what is actually best. Rhyme, up to this hour, never seems altogether obedient to him; and disobedient Rhyme,—who would ride on it that had once learned walking?

He takes amiss that some friends have admonished him to quit Politics; we will not repeat that admonition. Let him, on this as on all other matters, take solemn counsel with his own Socrates'-Demon; such

as dwells in every mortal; such as he is a happy mortal who can hear the voice of, follow the behests of, like an unalterable law. At the same time, we could truly wish to see such a mind as his engaged rather in considering what, in his own sphere, could be *done*, than what, in his own or other spheres, ought to be *destroyed;* rather in producing or preserving the True, than in mangling and slashing asunder the False. Let him be at ease: the False is already dead, or lives only with a mock life. The death-sentence of the False was of old, from the first beginning of it, written in Heaven; and is now proclaimed in the Earth, and read aloud at all market-crosses; nor are innumerable volunteer tipstaves and headsmen wanting to execute the same; for which needful service men inferior to him may suffice. Why should the heart of the Corn-Law Rhymer be troubled? Spite of "Bread-tax," he and his brave children, who will emulate their sire, have yet bread; the Workhouse, as we rejoice to fancy, has receded into the safe distance; and is now quite shut out from his poetic pleasure-ground. Why should he afflict himself with devices of "Boroughmongering gowls," or the rage of the Heathen imagining a vain thing? This matter, which he calls Corn-Law, will not have completed itself, adjusted itself into clearness, for the space of a century or two; nay after twenty centuries, what will there, or can there be for the son of Adam but Work, Work, two hands quite *full* of Work! Meanwhile, is not the Corn-Law Rhymer already a king, though a belligerent one; king of his own mind

and faculty; and what man in the long run is king of more? Not one in the thousand, even among sceptred kings, of so much. Be diligent in business, then; fervent in spirit. Above all things, lay aside anger, uncharitableness, hatred, noisy tumult; avoid them, as worse than Pestilence, worse than "Bread-tax" itself:

"For it well beseemeth kings, all mortals it beseemeth well,
To possess their souls in patience, and await what can betide."

THOMAS CARLYLE.

THE QUARTERLY REVIEW.

The Quarterly Review, June 1812.

IRISH MELODIES, WITH WORDS.

By THOMAS MOORE, Esq.

Four Numbers. Power, Strand.

We offer no apology to our readers for stepping a little out of our track to review a series of poems published with music; because as they bear the name of Mr. Moore, it will at once be perceived that they can have no affinity to those well-bred effusions, which Lauretta and Rosabella are perpetually prevailing upon their music-masters to print with a tune.

Nothing can be more satisfactorily explained than the high degree of honour acquired by the lyric bards of antiquity. Their poetry had not only sublimity and beauty to strike the soul and win the affections, but enjoyed the farther benefit of musical accompaniments, admirably suited to fan the animation which they kindled. When to this we add the occasions on which the lyrical compositions of the Greeks were usually exhibited, at sacred festivals and public rejoicings, where the splendour and solemnity, the bustle and pride of the scene, concurred to awaken the strongest emotions of taste and patriotism, we

shall not wonder that, among so susceptible and polished a people, the odes and choruses of their great poets were regarded with an enthusiasm at once affectionate and ardent. And, as the elevation of one branch of a family frequently exalts the others, the glory belonging to the sublimer classes of lyric poetry reflected its lustre on those slighter effusions which were allied to them by their common connection with music.

But the changes of manners have wrought correspondent revolutions in taste. The impatience of fashion will endure no piece of music which has not the recommendation of brevity, whatever be the merit of the poetry connected with it. Few odes, therefore, are now set to music; so that the greatest part of what is called lyric poetry in the works of the chief modern writers is no longer lyric except in its name, having avowedly been written, not to be accompanied by music, but simply to be read. Indeed it was not to be expected that men of genius, accustomed to classical and canonised forms, would often be found willing to curtail their compositions for the sake of musical accompaniment; so little has usually been the reputation attached to the shorter effusions of poetry.

We conceive that song-writing has sunk in popular estimation far below its just level; but we can scarcely wonder at it, when we contemplate the demerits of those who, through a long succession of years, have addicted themselves to the polite art of making canzonets for the young ladies of their

acquaintance. These well-meaning persons, we fear, have brought discredit upon the muse who has been so unfortunate as to obtain their partiality; and thus, probably, it has happened that lyric poetry has lost so much of its ancient honour. Its character and consequence have been appraised in the gross, and the few good poets overlooked or confounded in the multitude of pretenders.

This indiscriminating depreciation is, in truth, an error much more important than at first sight it may appear; not only as taste is concerned, but as national character may be affected. We do not mean to insist upon the influence which poetry has actually had in forming or improving the minds or manners of the English people; nay, we are afraid that the enthusiasm of taste has but too often overrated the effect of every fine art upon the national character,—unless, indeed, the phrase is meant to denote merely the character of the higher ranks of society. This want of effect however must not be ascribed to any inherent inefficiency in the nature of poetry itself; but to the circumstances, which, in this case, have denied it the opportunity of proving its influence. In Greece, where its enjoyments were communicated through the medium of music to all ranks of the people, we have no doubt that poetry had great power in raising as well as refining the general character. Even the wild descants of the rude minstrels of later times have, in all forms, and most especially when accompanied by music, affected, in a marked and permanent manner, the character of

courts, and even of camps. We cannot but believe, therefore, that similar effects would have been produced by poetry upon our own commonalty if they had enjoyed similar advantages. Certainly, in the only case in which the experiment has been tried, we mean among our sailors, the result has been signally beneficial; and we should be wanting in justice if we did not add, highly creditable to the talents and feelings of the venerable bard who so patriotically devoted his genius to their service.

We admit that the temperament which disposes the soul to take fire at the beauties of poetry must, in every state, be limited to a very small number; and we suspect that even these, considered as a body, are not the most moral class of the community. The warmth which makes them so feelingly alive to the charms of verse, is apt to lead them to the indulgence of less innocent emotions; and though they may be capable of a sudden exertion of virtue, yet that very propensity which disposes them to receive impressions so readily, occasions these to be as readily effaced.

It is not, however, by this romantic kind of impression, that the most important benefits of poetry are usually produced. These, we think, are more essentially promoted by that repugnance to everything mean and ignoble, which becomes habitual from the study of nature in the purity of her poetical form; by the innocent, and at the same time agreeable direction which the pursuits of taste impart to the idler propensities of the mind; by the influence of generous and pathetic verse in keeping open those

hearts which are in danger of being choked with the cares of business, or the still more hardening apathy of wealth; and, most of all, by that suavity of manner which the fine arts create and nourish, and which education and the unrestrained intercourse of good society are daily extending from the higher to the middling classes. It is not, in short, to strong impressions made on particular persons, but to the laudable habits and manners which a prevailing disposition to poetical pursuits insensibly insinuates into the whole social system, that we ascribe the benefit produced by poetry upon national character. That benefit is not a sudden luxuriance engendered by a partial inundation; it grows and ripens like the regular harvest of the season, fostered by the dews and silent rains of heaven.

These are some of our reasons for regretting, that the chief English poets have contributed so little toward a collection of songs worthy to accompany the bold and touching strains of music bequeathed by the bards of more romantic ages. We have stated our opinions rather largely, because we think that the present circumstances of society have given the subject more consequence than it ever possessed before. The abolition of those prejudices which so long condemned the female part of the community to intellectual idleness, has admitted a new and very numerous class to the enjoyments of poetry. Now, of all the poetry which women usually read, the verses that accompany their music form by far the most important portion. If then it be of consequence

to form and guide the tastes and pursuits of those who are to be wives and mothers, we should encourage the genius of our lyric poets to its utmost attainable perfection. We should remember the flexibility of the female mind in early youth, and the readiness with which it receives either a good or an evil impulse. We should consider the extreme sensibility of women to the charms of music, and their sympathy with the tone of feeling, which the words connected with that music breathe. We should reflect too upon the striking effect which, in countries where such poems have been more highly valued, the songs of love, of war, and of patriotism have produced, not upon women only, but upon "bearded men": and thus be led to take a more liberal view of an art which, rightly directed, must be essentially conducive to the cultivation of the warmest and tenderest affections of the heart.

Before we proceed to the direct examination of Mr. Moore's poems, we must be permitted to say a few words about the qualities which we conceive to be the most essential in a song. The first requisite appears to be a decisive tone of feeling, whether joyous or melancholy, tender or heroic. In the next place, the versification, we think, should be free from all forced inversion; a species of construction which saves the trouble of the writer by increasing that of the reader; which checks the flow of sympathy even at its crisis; and renders the representation of nature a distortion of her features and not a reflection.

We will mention only one more quality essential to

a song,—it should be very short. There is some difficulty, no doubt, in producing a strong effect upon the feelings within the small compass of two or three stanzas; but this makes it the more necessary to allure superior talents into the undertaking. Ambition is not appalled by difficulties when honour lies beyond them; and if the reputation of song writing were placed on a more equal footing with that of other poetry, the additional toil which songs require, would be counterbalanced by the more general circulation which their association with music usually obtains for them. In one or other of these requisites most of the older songs are obviously defective; and the praise of producing a large and interesting collection, not only free from cramped versification and prolixity, but distinguished for positive excellence, was reserved for the poet whose works are now before us.

Of his original and fatal error, the sacrifice of decorum at the altar of love, that crime for which, in his youth, he "lost the world, and was content to lose it," the present volumes happily retain no traces. The soul of his poetry has transmigrated into a purer form; and the verse, which once courted admiration by meretricious enticements alone, now steals to the heart with a surer interest, by the modesty which softens and consecrates the influence of beauty.

The most remarkable fault, in the plan of the present work, is a superabundance of ballads upon topics merely Irish. If Mr. Moore were a person whose writings were not calculated to extend beyond

the narrow circle of a few discontented place-hunters in Ireland, he might strike his harp in vituperation of government until its strings cracked, without molestation from us; but as this work, not only from the author's previous fame, but from its own intrinsic merits, is likely to attract considerable attention, we put it to Mr. Moore's own judgment, whether he would not have consulted his reputation more effectually by excluding all topics of a local or political nature; topics which, by impartial readers are generally scanned with indifference, and by no small number of zealous partizans with absolute disgust. At the same time it is but justice to confess that there are some of this class (particularly the third song in the third number, beginning "Oh! blame not the bard") of which, in our opinion, the energy and pathos have seldom been exceeded.

In the next place, it must be observed, that our poet is but too prone to run into strained, incorrect, and remote resemblances, so that he becomes confused, and sometimes even unintelligible. Yet he has the skill to disguise his inaccuracies in language so elegant, and melody so lulling, that though the fallacy be perceptible to the reader, the hearer is almost inevitably deceived.

There are also two or three songs in the collection, partaking of that character which, for want of a more classical title, has been usually styled, the namby-pamby. Such are, "While gazing on the moon's light," in the third number, and "What the bee is to the floweret," in the fourth. There are also a few,

though but a few, which have no striking beauty, and no glaring demerit.

But, when we have set aside all those passages which are faulty for political and local partialities, or the intermixture of false and far-fetched thoughts, or the introduction of incoherent metaphors and epithets, or a simplicity bordering upon childishness, or the mere absence of positive merit,—there will still be left a large body of songs, exhibiting, we venture to say, a greater variety, and a higher tone of excellence, than this order of poetry had often before attained. The most careless reader must be struck by the imagery of the following stanza: there is an old tradition that Lough Neagh suddenly rose above its level, and overwhelmed a whole region: long after which event, according to Giraldus, "the fishermen, in clear weather, used to point out to strangers the tall ecclesiastical towers, still rearing themselves beneath the waters."

"On Lough Neagh's bank as the fisherman strays,
When the clear cold eve's declining,
He sees the round towers of other days,
In the wave beneath him shining!

Thus shall memory often, in dreams sublime,
Catch a glimpse of the days that are over,
Thus, sighing, look thro' the waves of time,
For the long-faded glories they cover."

In the delineation of that deep and settled melancholy, which affects the heart with a dead, yet aching heaviness, and makes life appear a blank, uninteresting

alike in its pleasures and its pains, Mr. Moore is peculiarly successful.

"As a beam o'er the face of the waters may glow,
While the tide runs in darkness and coldness below,
So the cheek may be tinged with a warm sunny smile,
Tho' the cold heart to ruin runs darkly the while.

One fatal remembrance, one sorrow, that throws
Its bleak shade alike o'er our joys and our woes,
To which life nothing darker or brighter can bring,
For which joy has no balm, and affliction no sting;—

Oh, that thought in the midst of enjoyment will stay," etc.

Nor is he less so, where a gleam of gaiety is admitted to relieve the sadness of the sentiment.

. . . . . .

Mr. Moore possesses, we think, in an eminent degree, the virtue of poetical spirit, that excellence which redeems so many faults. When his feelings are roused, he pours them out with an eloquent energy, which sweeps along as freely as if there were no shackles of rhyme or metre to confine its movements.

"We swear to revenge them!—no joy shall be tasted,
The harp shall be silent, the maiden unwed,
Our halls shall be mute, and our fields shall lie wasted,
Till vengeance is wreak'd on the murderer's head!

Yes, monarch! though sweet are our home recollections,
Though sweet are the tears that from tenderness fall,
Though sweet are our friendships, and hopes, and affections,
Revenge on a tyrant is sweetest of all."

Of all the charms, however, which the poetry of these volumes may be thought to possess, there is none so captivating to us, as its genuine tenderness:

"Though the last glimpse of Erin with sorrow I see,
Yet wherever thou art shall seem Erin to me;
In exile thy bosom shall still be my home,
And thine eyes make my climate wherever we roam."

And if there had been no political allusion, we might have recognised, as one of the most affecting poems in the English language, the address of the lover to his mistress:

"When he who adores thee has left but the name
Of his fault and his sorrows behind,
Oh! say, wilt thou weep, when they darken the fame
Of a life that for thee was resign'd?
Yes, weep! and, however my foes may condemn,
Thy tears shall efface their decree,
For Heaven can witness, tho' guilty to them,
I have been but too faithful to thee!

With thee were the dreams of my earliest love,
Ev'ry thought of my reason was thine:—
In my last humble pray'r to the Spirit above,
Thy name shall be mingled with mine!
Oh bless'd are the lovers and friends who shall live
The days of that glory to see:
But the next dearest blessing that Heaven can give,
Is the pride of thus dying for thee!"

On the whole, the songs accompanying the Irish Melodies, contain, together with some faults, a proportion of beauties more numerous and striking than can readily be found in any similar work with which

we are acquainted. The author has the merit of setting an example, which, though it may not be easily equalled, will, in all probability be imitated, and we hope, not without benefit to literary taste and national character.

The Quarterly Review, October 1815.

EMMA: A NOVEL.

By the Author of "Sense and Sensibility," "Pride and Prejudice," etc.

3 *vols.*, 12*mo.* *London*, 1815.

There are some vices in civilised society so common that they are hardly acknowledged as stains upon the moral character, the propensity to which is nevertheless carefully concealed, even by those who most frequently give way to them; since no man of pleasure would willingly assume the gross epithet of a debauchee or a drunkard. One would almost think that novel-reading fell under this class of frailties, since among the crowds who read little else, it is not common to find an individual of hardihood sufficient to avow his taste for these frivolous studies. A novel, therefore, is frequently "bread eaten in secret"; and it is not upon Lydia Languish's toilet alone that *Tom Jones* and *Peregrine Pickle* are to be found ambushed behind works of a more grave and instructive character. And hence it has happened, that in no branch of composition, not even in poetry itself, have so many writers, and of such varied talents, exerted

their powers. It may perhaps be added, that although the composition of these works admits of being exalted and decorated by the higher exertions of genius; yet such is the universal charm of narrative, that the worst novel ever written will find some gentle reader content to yawn over it, rather than to open the page of the historian, moralist, or poet. We have heard, indeed, of one work of fiction so unutterably stupid, that the proprietor, diverted by the rarity of the incident, offered the book, which consisted of two volumes in duodecimo, handsomely bound, to any person who would declare, upon his honour, that he had read the whole from beginning to end. But although this offer was made to the passengers on board an Indiaman, during a tedious outward-bound voyage, the *Memoirs of Clegg the Clergyman*, (such was the title of this unhappy composition), completely baffled the most dull and determined student on board, and bid fair for an exception to the general rule above-mentioned,—when the love of glory prevailed with the boatswain, a man of strong and solid parts, to hazard the attempt, and he actually conquered and carried off the prize!

The judicious reader will see at once that we have been pleading our own cause while stating the universal practice, and preparing him for a display of more general acquaintance with this fascinating department of literature, than at first sight may seem consistent with the graver studies to which we are compelled by duty: but in truth, when we consider how many hours of languor and anxiety, of

deserted age and solitary celibacy, of pain and poverty, are beguiled by the perusal of these light volumes, we cannot austerely condemn the source from which is drawn the alleviation of such a portion of human misery, or consider the regulation of this department as beneath the sober consideration of the critic.

If such apologies may be admitted in judging the labours of ordinary novelists, it becomes doubly the duty of the critic to treat with kindness as well as candour works, which, like this before us, proclaim a knowledge of the human heart, with the power and resolution to bring that knowledge to the service of honour and virtue. The author is already known to the public by the two novels announced in her title-page, and both, the last especially, attracted, with justice, an attention from the public far superior to what is granted to the ephemeral productions which supply the regular demand of watering-places and circulating libraries. They belong to a class of fictions which has arisen almost in our own times, and which draws the characters and incidents introduced more immediately from the current of ordinary life than was permitted by the former rules of the novel.

In its first appearance, the novel was the legitimate child of the romance; and though the manners and general turn of the composition were altered so as to suit modern times, the author remained fettered by many peculiarities derived from the original style of romantic fiction. These may be chiefly traced in the conduct of the narrative, and the tone of sentiment

attributed to the fictitious personages. On the first point, although

> "The talisman and magic wand were broke,
> Knights, dwarfs, and genii vanish'd into smoke."

still the reader expected to peruse a course of adventures of a nature more interesting and extraordinary than those which occur in his own life, or that of his next-door neighbours. The hero no longer defeated armies by his single sword, clove giants to the chine, or gained kingdoms. But he was expected to go through perils by sea and land, to be steeped in poverty, to be tried by temptation, to be exposed to the alternate vicissitudes of adversity and prosperity, and his life was a troubled scene of suffering and achievement. Few novelists, indeed, adventured to deny to the hero his final hour of tranquillity and happiness, though it was the prevailing fashion never to relieve him out of his last and most dreadful distress until the finishing chapters of his history; so that although his prosperity in the record of his life was short, we were bound to believe it was long and uninterrupted when the author had done with him. The heroine was usually condemned to equal hardships and hazards. She was regularly exposed to being forcibly carried off like a Sabine virgin by some frantic admirer. And even if she escaped the terrors of masked ruffians, an insidious ravisher, a cloak wrapped forcibly around her head, and a coach with the blinds up, driving she could not

conjecture whither, she had still her share of wandering, of poverty, of obloquy, of seclusion, and of imprisonment, and was frequently extended on a bed of sickness, and reduced to her last shilling before the author condescended to shield her from persecution. In all these dread contingencies the mind of the reader was expected to sympathise, since by incidents so much beyond the bounds of his ordinary experience, his wonder and interest ought at once to be excited. But gradually he became familiar with the land of fiction, the adventures of which he assimilated not with those of real life, but with each other Let the distress of the hero or heroine be ever so great, the reader reposed an imperturbable confidence in the talents of the author, who, as he had plunged them into distress, would in his own good time, and when things, as Tony Lumkin says, were in a concatenation accordingly, bring his favourites out of all their troubles. Mr. Crabbe has expressed his own and our feelings excellently on this subject:

> "For should we grant these beauties all endure
> Severest pangs, they've still the speediest cure;
> Before one charm be wither'd from the face,
> Except the bloom which shall again have place,
> In wedlock ends each wish, in triumph all disgrace.
> And life to come, we fairly may suppose,
> One light bright contrast to these wild dark woes."

In short, the author of novels was, in former times, expected to tread pretty much in the limits between the concentric circles of probability and possibility;

and as he was not permitted to transgress the latter, his narrative, to make amends, almost always went beyond the bounds of the former. Now, although it may be urged that the vicissitudes of human life have occasionally led an individual through as many scenes of singular fortune as are represented in the most extravagant of these fictions, still the causes and personages acting on these changes have varied with the progress of the adventurer's fortune, and do not present that combined plot, (the object of every skilful novelist), in which all the more interesting individuals of the *dramatis personæ* have their appropriate share in the action, and in bringing about the catastrophe. Here, even more than in its various and violent changes of fortune, rests the improbability of the novel. The life of a man rolls forth like a stream from the fountain, or it spreads out into tranquillity like a placid or stagnant lake. In the latter case, the individual grows old among the characters with whom he was born, and is contemporary,—shares precisely the sort of weal and woe to which his birth destined him,—moves in the same circle,—and, allowing for the change of seasons, is influenced by, and influences the same class of persons by which he was originally surrounded. The man of mark and of adventure, on the contrary, resembles, in the course of his life, the river whose mid-current and discharge into the ocean are widely removed from each other, as well as from the rocks and wild flowers which its fountains first reflected; violent changes of time, of place, and of circumstances

hurry him forward from one scene to another, and his adventures will usually be found only connected with each other because they have happened to the same individual. Such a history resembles an ingenious, fictitious narrative, exactly in the degree in which an old dramatic chronicle of the life and death of some distinguished character, where all the various agents appear and disappear as in the page of history, approaches a regular drama, in which every person introduced plays an appropriate part, and every point of the action tends to one common catastrophe.

We return to the second broad line of distinction between the novel, as formerly composed, and real life,—the difference, namely, of sentiments. The novelist professed to give an imitation of nature, but it was, as the French say, *la belle nature*. Human beings, indeed, were presented, but in the most sentimental mood, and with minds purified by a sensibility which often verged on extravagance. In the serious class of novels, the hero was usually

"A knight of love, who never broke a vow."

And although, in those of a more humorous cast, he was permitted a licence, borrowed either from real life or from the libertinism of the drama, still a distinction was demanded even from *Peregrine Pickle* or *Tom Jones;* and the hero, in every folly of which he might be guilty, was studiously vindicated from the charge of infidelity of the heart. The heroine

was, of course, still more immaculate; and to have conferred her affections upon any other than the lover to whom the reader had destined her from their first meeting, would have been a crime against sentiment which no author, of moderate prudence, would have hazarded, under the old *régime*.

Here, therefore, we have two essential and important circumstances in which the earlier novels differed from those now in fashion, and were more nearly assimilated to the old romances. And there can be no doubt that, by the studied involution and extrication of the story, by the combination of incidents new, striking, and wonderful beyond the course of ordinary life, the former authors opened that obvious and strong sense of interest which arises from curiosity; as by the pure, elevated, and romantic cast of the sentiment, they conciliated those better propensities of our nature which loves to contemplate the picture of virtue, even when confessedly unable to imitate its excellences.

But strong and powerful as these sources of emotion and interest may be, they are, like all others, capable of being exhausted by habit. The imitators who rushed in crowds upon each path in which the great masters of the art had successively led the way, produced upon the public mind the usual effect of satiety. The first writer of a new class is, as it were, placed on a pinnacle of excellence, to which at the earliest glance of a surprised admirer, his ascent seems little less than miraculous. Time and imitation speedily diminish the wonder, and each successive

attempt establishes a kind of progressive scale of ascent between the lately deified author, and the reader, who had deemed his excellence inaccessible. The stupidity, the mediocrity, the merit of his imitators, are alike fatal to the first inventor, by showing how possible it is to exaggerate his faults, and to come within a certain point of his beauties.

Materials also, (and the man of genius as well as his wretched imitator must work with the same), become stale and familiar. Social life, in our civilised days, affords few instances capable of being painted in the strong dark colours which excite surprise and horror; and robbers, smugglers, bailiffs, caverns, dungeons, and mad-houses, have been all introduced until they ceased to interest. And thus in the novel, as in every style of composition which appeals to the public taste, the more rich and easily worked mines being exhausted, the adventurous author must, if he is desirous of success, have recourse to those which were disdained by his predecessors as unproductive, or avoided as only capable of being turned to profit by great skill and labour.

Accordingly a style of novel has arisen, within the last fifteen or twenty years, differing from the former in the points upon which the interest hinges; neither alarming our credulity nor amusing our imagination by wild variety of incident, or by those pictures of romantic affection and sensibility, which were formerly as certain attributes of fictitious characters, as they are of rare occurrence among those who actually live and die. The substitute for

these excitements, which had lost much of their poignancy by the repeated and injudicious use of them, was the art of copying from nature as she really exists in the common walks of life, and presenting to the reader, instead of the splendid scenes of an imaginary world, a correct and striking representation of that which is daily taking place around him.

In adventuring upon this task, the author makes obvious sacrifices, and encounters peculiar difficulty. He who paints *le beau idéal*, if his scenes and sentiments are striking and interesting, is in a great measure exempted from the difficult task of reconciling them with the ordinary probabilities of life; but he who paints a scene of common occurrence, places his composition within that extensive range of criticism which general experience offers to every reader. The resemblance of a statue of Hercules we must take on the artist's judgment; but every one can criticise that which is presented as the portrait of a friend or neighbour. Something more than a mere sign-post likeness is also demanded. The portrait must have spirit and character, as well as resemblance; and being deprived of all that which, according to Bayes, "goes to elevate and surprise," it must make amends by displaying depth of knowledge and dexterity of execution. We, therefore, bestow no mean compliment upon the author of *Emma*, when we say that, keeping close to common incidents and to such characters as occupy the ordinary walks of life, she has produced sketches of such spirit and

originality, that we never miss the excitation which depends upon a narrative of uncommon events, arising from the consideration of minds, manners, and sentiments greatly above our own. In this class she stands almost alone; for the scenes of Miss Edgeworth are laid in higher life, varied by more romantic incident, and by her remarkable power of embodying and illustrating national character. But the author of *Emma* confines herself chiefly to the middling classes of society; her most distinguished characters do not rise greatly above well-bred country gentlemen and ladies; and those which are sketched with most originality and precision, belong to a class rather below that standard. The narrative of all her novels is composed of such common occurrences as may have fallen under the observation of most folks; and her *dramatis personæ* conduct themselves upon the motives and principles which the readers may recognise as ruling their own and that of most of their acquaintances. The kind of moral, also, which these novels inculcate, applies equally to the paths of common life, as will best appear from a short notice of the author's former works, with a more full abstract of that which we at present have under consideration.

Sense and Sensibility, the first of these compositions, contains the history of two sisters. The elder, a young lady of prudence and regulated feelings, becomes gradually attached to a man of an excellent heart and limited talents, who happens unfortunately to be fettered by a rash and ill-assorted engagement.

In the younger sister, the influence of sensibility and imagination predominates; and she, as was to be expected, also falls in love, but with more unbridled and wilful passion. Her lover, gifted with all the qualities of exterior polish and vivacity, proves faithless, and marries a woman of large fortune. The interest and merit of the piece depend altogether upon the behaviour of the elder sister, while obliged at once to sustain her own disappointment with fortitude, and to support her sister, who abandons herself, with unsuppressed feelings, to the indulgence of grief. The marriage of the unworthy rival at length relieves her own lover from his imprudent engagement, while her sister, turned wise by precept, example, and experience, transfers her affection to a very respectable and somewhat too serious admirer, who had nourished an unsuccessful passion through three volumes.

In *Pride and Prejudice* the author presents us with a family of young women, bred up under a foolish and vulgar mother, and a father whose good abilities lay hid under such a load of indolence and insensibility, that he had become contented to make the foibles and follies of his wife and daughters the subject of dry and humorous sarcasm, rather than of admonition, or restraint. This is one of the portraits from ordinary life which shows our author's talents in a very strong point of view. A friend of ours, whom the author never saw or heard of, was at once recognised by his own family as the original of Mr. Bennet, and we do not know if he has yet got rid of the

nickname. A Mr. Collins, too, a formal, conceited, yet servile young sprig of divinity, is drawn with the same force and precision. The story of the piece consists chiefly in the fates of the second sister, to whom a man of high birth, large fortune, but haughty and reserved manners, becomes attached in spite of the discredit thrown upon the object of his affection by the vulgarity and ill-conduct of her relations. The lady, on the contrary, hurt at the contempt of her connections, which the lover does not even attempt to suppress, and prejudiced against him on other accounts, refuses the hand which he ungraciously offers, and does not perceive that she has done a foolish thing until she accidentally visits a very handsome seat and grounds belonging to her admirer. They chance to meet exactly as her prudence had begun to subdue her prejudice; and after some essential services rendered to her family, the lover becomes encouraged to renew his addresses, and the novel ends happily.

Emma has even less story than either of the preceding novels. Miss Emma Woodhouse, from whom the book takes its name, is the daughter of a gentleman of wealth and consequence residing at his seat in the immediate vicinage of a country village called Highbury. The father, a good-natured silly valetudinary, abandons the management of his household to Emma, he himself being only occupied by his summer and winter walk, his apothecary, his gruel, and his whist table. The latter is supplied from the neighbouring village of Highbury with precisely the sort of persons

who occupy the vacant corners of a regular whist table, when a village is in the neighbourhood, and better cannot be found within the family. We have the smiling and courteous vicar, who nourishes the ambitious hope of obtaining Miss Woodhouse's hand. We have Mrs. Bates, the wife of a former rector, past everything but tea and whist; her daughter, Miss Bates, a good-natured, vulgar, and foolish old maid; Mr. Weston, a gentleman of a frank disposition and moderate fortune, in the vicinity, and his wife, an amiable and accomplished person, who had been Emma's governess, and is devotedly attached to her. Amongst all these personages, Miss Woodhouse walks forth, the princess paramount, superior to all her companions in wit, beauty, fortune, and accomplishments, doated upon by her father and the Westons, admired, and almost worshipped, by the more humble companions of the whist table. The object of most young ladies is, or at least is usually supposed to be, a desirable connection in marriage. But Emma Woodhouse, either anticipating the taste of a later period of life, or, like a good sovereign preferring the weal of her subjects of Highbury to her own private interest, sets generously about making matches for her friends without thinking of matrimony on her own account We are informed that she had been eminently successful in the case of Mr. and Mrs. Weston; and when the novel commences she is exerting her influence in favour of Miss Harriet Smith, a boarding-school girl without family or fortune, very good humoured, very pretty, very silly, and, what suited

Miss Woodhouse's purpose best of all, very much disposed to be married.

In these conjugal machinations Emma is frequently interrupted, not only by the cautions of her father, who had a particular objection to anybody committing the rash act of matrimony, but also by the sturdy reproof and remonstrances of Mr. Knightly, the elder brother of her sister's husband, a sensible country gentleman of thirty-five, who had known Emma from her cradle, and was the only person who ventured to find fault with her. In spite, however, of his censure and warning, Emma lays a plan of marrying Harriet Smith to the vicar; and though she succeeds perfectly in diverting her simple friend's thoughts from an honest farmer who had made her a very suitable offer, and in flattering her into a passion for Mr. Elton, yet, on the other hand, that conceited divine totally mistakes the nature of the encouragement held out to him, and attributes the favour which he found in Miss Woodhouse's eyes to a lurking affection on her own part. This at length encourages him to a presumptuous declaration of his sentiments; upon receiving a repulse, he looks abroad elsewhere, and enriches the Highbury society by uniting himself to a dashing young woman with as many thousands as are usually called ten, and a corresponding quantity of presumption and ill-breeding.

While Emma is thus vainly engaged in forging wedlock-fetters for others, her friends have views of the same kind upon her, in favour of a son of Mr. Weston by a former marriage, who bears the name,

lives under the patronage, and is to inherit the fortune of a rich uncle. Unfortunately, Mr. Frank Churchill had already settled his affections on Miss Jane Fairfax, a young lady of reduced fortune; but as this was a concealed affair, Emma, when Mr. Churchill first appears on the stage, has some thoughts of being in love with him herself; speedily, however, recovering from that dangerous propensity, she is disposed to confer him upon her deserted friend Harriet Smith. Harriet has in the interim, fallen desperately in love with Mr. Knightly, the sturdy advice-giving bachelor; and, as all the village supposes Frank Churchill and Emma to be attached to each other, there are cross purposes enough, (were the novel of a more romantic cast), for cutting half the men's throats, and breaking all the women's hearts. But at Highbury Cupid walks decorously, and with good discretion, bearing his torch under a lanthorn, instead of flourishing it around to set the house on fire. All these entanglements bring on only a train of mistakes, and embarrassing situations, and dialogues at balls and parties of pleasure, in which the author displays her peculiar powers of humour and knowledge of human life. The plot is extricated with great simplicity. The aunt of Frank Churchill dies; his uncle, no longer under her baneful influence, consents to his marriage with Jane Fairfax. Mr. Knightly and Emma are led, by this unexpected incident, to discover that they had been in love with each other all along. Mr. Woodhouse's objections to the marriage of his daughter are overpowered by the fears of house-breakers, and the

comfort which he hopes to derive from having a stout son-in-law resident in the family; and the facile affections of Harriet Smith are transferred, like a bank bill by indorsation, to her former suitor, the honest farmer, who had obtained a favourable opportunity of renewing his addresses. Such is the simple plan of a story which we peruse with pleasure, if not with deep interest, and which perhaps we might more willingly resume than one of those narratives where the attention is strongly riveted, during the first perusal, by the powerful excitement of curiosity.

The author's knowledge of the world, and the peculiar tact with which she presents characters that the reader cannot fail to recognise, reminds us something of the merits of the Flemish school of painting. The subjects are not often elegant, and certainly never grand; but they are finished up to nature, and with a precision which delights the reader. This is a merit which it is very difficult to illustrate by extracts, because it pervades the whole work, and is not to be comprehended from a single passage.

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The faults on the contrary, arise from the minute detail which the author's plan comprehends. Characters of folly or simplicity, such as those of old Woodhouse and Miss Bates, are ridiculous when first presented, but if too often brought forward or too long dwelt upon, their prosing is apt to become as tiresome in fiction as in real society. Upon the whole, the turn of this author's novels bears the same relation to that of the sentimental and romantic cast,

that cornfields and cottages and meadows bear to the highly adorned grounds of a show mansion, or the rugged sublimities of a mountain landscape. It is neither so captivating as the one, nor so grand as the other, but it affords to those who frequent it a pleasure nearly allied with the experience of their own social habits; and what is of some importance, the youthful wanderer may return from his promenade to the ordinary business of life, without any chance of having his head turned by the recollection of the scene through which he has been wandering.

One word, however, we must say in behalf of that once powerful divinity, Cupid, king of gods and men, who in these times of revolution, has been assailed, even in his own kingdom of romance, by the authors who were formerly his devoted priests. We are quite aware that there are few instances of first attachment being brought to a happy conclusion, and that it seldom can be so in a state of society so highly advanced as to render early marriages among the better class, acts, generally speaking, of imprudence. But the youth of this realm need not at present be taught the doctrine of selfishness. It is by no means their error to give the world, or the good things of the world, all for love; and before the authors of moral fiction couple Cupid indivisibly with calculating prudence, we would have them reflect, that they may sometimes lend their aid to substitute more mean, more sordid, and more selfish motives of conduct, for the romantic feelings which their predecessors perhaps fanned into too powerful a flame. Who is it,

that in his youth has felt a virtuous attachment, however romantic or however unfortunate, but can trace back to its influence much that his character may possess of what is honourable, dignified, and disinterested? If he recollects hours wasted in unavailing hope, or saddened by doubt and disappointment; he may also dwell on many which have been snatched from folly or libertinism, and dedicated to studies which might render him worthy of the object of his affection, or pave the way perhaps to that distinction necessary to raise him to an equality with her. Even the habitual indulgence of feelings totally unconnected with ourself and our own immediate interest, softens, graces, and amends the human mind; and after the pain of disappointment is past, those who survive, (and by good fortune those are the greater number), are neither less wise nor less worthy members of society for having felt, for a time, the influence of a passion which has been well qualified as the "tenderest, noblest, and best."

The Quarterly Review, April 1818.

ENDYMION: A POETIC ROMANCE.

By JOHN KEATS.

207 *pp. London*, 1818.

Reviewers have been sometimes accused of not reading the works which they affected to criticise. On the present occasion we shall anticipate the author's complaint, and honestly confess that we have not read his work. Not that we have been wanting in our duty,—far from it,—indeed, we have made efforts almost as superhuman as the story itself appears to be, to get through it; but with the fullest stretch of our perseverance, we are forced to confess that we have not been able to struggle beyond the first of the four books of which this Poetic Romance consists. We should extremely lament this want of energy, or whatever it may be on our parts, were it not for one consolation,—namely, that we are no better acquainted with the meaning of the book through which we have so painfully toiled, than we are with that of the three which we have not looked into.

It is not that Mr. Keats, (if that be his real name, for we almost doubt that any man in his senses would put his real name to such a rhapsody), it is

not, we say, that the author has not powers of language, rays of fancy, and gleams of genius,—he has all these; but he is unhappily a disciple of the new school of what has been somewhere called Cockney poetry; which may be defined to consist of the most incongruous ideas in the most uncouth language.

Of this school, Mr. Leigh Hunt, as we observed in a former Number, aspires to be the hierophant. Our readers will recollect the pleasant recipes for harmonious and sublime poetry which he gave us in his preface to *Rimini*, and the still more facetious instances of his harmony and sublimity in the verses themselves; and they will recollect above all the contempt of Pope, Johnson, and such like poetasters and pseudo-critics, which so forcibly contrasted itself with Mr. Leigh Hunt's self-complacent approbation of

> "——all the things itself had wrote,
> Of special merit though of little note."

This author is a copyist of Mr. Hunt; but he is more unintelligible, almost as rugged, twice as diffuse, and ten times more tiresome and absurd than his prototype, who, though he impudently presumed to seat himself in the chair of criticism, and to measure his own poetry by his own standard, yet generally had a meaning. But Mr. Keats had advanced no dogmas which he was bound to support by examples; his nonsense therefore is quite gratuitous; he writes it for its own sake, and being bitten by Mr. Leigh Hunt's insane criticism, more than rivals the insanity of his poetry.

Mr. Keats's preface hints that his poem was produced under peculiar circumstances.

"Knowing within myself, (he says), the manner in which this Poem has been produced, it is not without a feeling of regret that I make it public.—What manner I mean, will be *quite clear* to the reader, who must soon perceive great inexperience, immaturity, and every error denoting a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished."—Preface, p. vii.

We humbly beg his pardon, but this does not appear to us to be *quite so clear*,—we really do not know what he means,—but the next passage is more intelligible.

"The two first books, and indeed the two last, I feel sensible are not of such completion as to warrant their passing the press."—Preface, p. vii.

Thus "the two first books" are, even in his own judgment, unfit to appear, and "the two last" are, it seems, in the same condition,—and as two and two make four, and as that is the whole number of books, we have a clear and, we believe, a very just estimate of the entire work.

Mr. Keats, however, deprecates criticism on this "immature and feverish work" in terms which are themselves sufficiently feverish; and we confess that we should have abstained from inflicting upon him any of the tortures of the "*fierce hell*" of criticism, which terrify his imagination, if he had not begged to be spared in order that he might write more; if we had not observed in him a certain degree of talent which deserves to be put in the right way, or which,

at least, ought to be warned of the wrong; and if, finally, he had not told us that he is of an age and temper which imperiously require mental discipline.

Of the story we have been able to make out but little; it seems to be mythological, and probably relates to the loves of Diana and Endymion; but of this, as the scope of the work has altogether escaped us, we cannot speak with any degree of certainty; and must therefore content ourselves with giving some instances of its diction and versification:—and here again we are perplexed and puzzled.—At first it appeared to us, that Mr. Keats had been amusing himself and wearying his readers with an immeasurable game at *bouts rimés;* but, if we recollect rightly, it is an indispensable condition at this play, that the rhymes when filled up shall have a meaning; and our author, as we have already hinted, has no meaning. He seems to us to write a line at random, and then he follows not the thought excited by this line, but that suggested by the *rhyme* with which it concludes. There is hardly a complete couplet inclosing a complete idea in the whole book. He wanders from one subject to another, from the association, not of ideas but of sounds, and the work is composed of hemistichs which, it is quite evident, have forced themselves upon the author by the mere force of the catchwords on which they turn.

We shall select, not as the most striking instance, but as that least liable to suspicion, a passage from the opening of the poem.

815

"——Such the sun, the moon,
Trees old and young, sprouting a shady boon
For single sheep; and such are daffodils
With the green world they live in; and clear rills
That for themselves a cooling covert make
'Gainst the hot season; the mid forest brake,
Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk-rose blooms:
And such too is the grandeur of the dooms
We have imagined for the mighty dead;" etc., etc.

Here it is clear that the word, and not the idea, *moon* produces the simple sheep and their shady *boon*, and that "the *dooms* of the mighty dead" would never have intruded themselves but for the "*fair musk-rose blooms.*"

Again—

"For 'twas the morn; Apollo's upward fire
Made every eastern cloud a silvery pyre
Of brightness so unsullied, that therein
A melancholy spirit well might win
Oblivion, and melt out his essence fine
Into the winds; rain-scented eglantine
Gave temperate sweets to that well-wooing sun;
The lark was lost in him; cold springs had run
To warm their chilliest bubbles in the grass;
Man's voice was on the mountains; and the mass
Of nature's lives and wonders puls'd tenfold,
To feel this sun-rise and its glories old."

Here Apollo's *fire* produces a *pyre*, a silvery pyre of clouds, *wherein* a spirit might *win* oblivion and melt his essence *fine*, and scented *eglantine* gives sweets to the *sun*, and cold springs had *run* into the *grass*, and then the pulse of the *mass* pulsed *tenfold* to feel the glories *old* of the new-born day, etc.

One example more.

> "Be still the unimaginable lodge
> For solitary thinkings; such as dodge
> Conception to the very bourne of heaven,
> Then leave the naked brain: be still the leaven
> That spreading in this dull and clodded earth
> Gives it a touch ethereal,—a new birth."

Lodge, dodge,—heaven, leaven,—earth, birth; such, in six words, is the sum and substance of six lines.

We come now to the author's taste in versification. He cannot indeed write a sentence, but perhaps he may be able to spin a line. Let us see. The following are specimens of his prosodial notions of our English heroic metre:—

> "Dear as the temple's self, so does the moon,
> The passion poesy, glories infinite."

> "So plenteously all weed-hidden roots."

> "Of some strange history, potent to send."

> "Before the deep intoxication."

> "Her scarf into a fluttering pavilion."

> "The stubborn canvass for my voyage prepared ——."

> "'Endymion! The cave is secreter
> Than the isle of Delos. Echo hence shall stir
> No sighs but sigh-warm kisses, or light noise
> Of thy combing hand, the while it travelling cloys
> And trembles through my labyrinthine hair.'"

By this time our readers must be pretty well satisfied as to the meaning of his sentences and the structure of his lines: we now present them with some of the new words with which, in imitation of Mr. Leigh Hunt, he adorns our language.

We are told that "turtles *passion* their voices," (p. 15); that "an arbour was *nested*," (p. 23); and a lady's locks "*gordian'd* up," (p. 32); and to supply the place of the nouns thus verbalised, Mr. Keats, with great fecundity, spawns new ones; such as "men-slugs and human *serpentry*," (p. 41); the "*honey-feel* of bliss," (p. 45); "wives prepare *needments*," (p. 13); —and so forth.

Then he has formed new verbs by the process of cutting off their natural tails the adverbs, and affixing them to their foreheads; thus, "the wine out-sparkled," (p. 10); the "multitude up-followed," (p. 11); and "night up-took," (p. 29). "The wind up-blows," (p. 32); and the "hours are down-sunken," (p. 36).

But if he sinks some adverbs in the verbs, he compensates the language with adverbs and adjectives which he separates from the parent stock. Thus, a lady "whispers *pantingly* and close," makes "*hushing* signs," and steers her skiff into a "*ripply* cove," (p. 23); a shower falls "*refreshfully*," (45); and a vulture has a "*spreaded* tail," (p. 44).

But enough of Mr. Leigh Hunt and his simple neophyte.—If any one should be bold enough to purchase this "Poetic Romance," and so much more patient, than ourselves, as to get beyond the first book, and so much more fortunate as to find a meaning, we entreat him to make us acquainted with his success; we shall then return to the task which we now abandon in despair and endeavour to make all due amends to Mr. Keats and to our readers.

BLACKWOOD'S EDINBURGH MAGAZINE.

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine,
January 1819.

THE REVOLT OF ISLAM: A POEM IN TWELVE CANTOS.

By PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

London, C. and J. Ollier, 1818.

A PERNICIOUS system of opinions concerning man and his moral government, a superficial audacity of unbelief, an overflowing abundance of uncharitableness towards almost the whole of his race, and a disagreeable measure of assurance and self-conceit, —each of these things is bad, and the combination of the whole of them in the character of any one person might, at first sight, be considered as more than sufficient to render that one person utterly and entirely contemptible. Nor has the fact, in general, been otherwise. In every age, the sure ultimate reward of the sophistical and phantastical enemies of religion and good order among mankind, has been found in the contempt and disgust of those against whose true interests their weapons had been employed. From this doom the most exquisite elegance of wit, and of words, the most perfect

keenness of intellect, the most flattering despotism over contemporary opinion,—all have not been able to preserve the inimitable Voltaire. In this doom, those wretched sophists of the present day, who would fain attempt to lift the load of oppressing infamy from off the memory of Voltaire, find their own living beings already entangled, "fold above fold, inextricable coil." Well may they despair:—we can almost pardon the bitterness of their disappointed malice. Their sentence was pronounced without hesitation, almost without pity,—for there was nothing in them to redeem their evil. They derived no benefit from that natural, universal, and proper feeling, which influences men to be slow in harshly, or suddenly, or irrevocably condemning intellects that bear upon them the stamp of power,—they had no part in that just spirit of respectfulness which makes men to contemplate, with an unwilling and unsteady eye, the aberrations of genius. The brand of inexpiable execration was ready in a moment to scar their fronts, and they have long wandered neglected about the earth,—perhaps saved from extinction, like the fratricide, by the very mark of their ignominy.

Mr. Shelley is devoting his mind to the same pernicious purposes which have recoiled in vengeance upon so many of his contemporaries; but he possesses the qualities of a powerful and vigorous intellect, and therefore his fate cannot be sealed so speedily as theirs. He also is of the "COCKNEY SCHOOL," so far as his opinions are concerned; but the base

opinions of the sect have not as yet been able entirely to obscure in him the character, or take away from him the privileges of the genius born within him. Hunt and Keats, and some others of the School, are indeed men of considerable cleverness, but as poets, they are worthy of sheer and instant contempt, and therefore their opinions are in little danger of being widely or deeply circulated by their means. But the system, which found better champions than it deserved even in them, has now, it would appear, been taken up by one, of whom it is far more seriously, and deeply, and lamentably unworthy ; and the poem before us bears unfortunately the clearest marks of its author's execrable system, but it is impressed everywhere with the more noble and majestic footsteps of his genius. It is to the operation of the painful feeling above alluded to, which attends the contemplation of perverted power,—that we chiefly ascribe the silence observed by our professional critics, in regard to the *Revolt of Islam.* Some have held back in the fear that, by giving to his genius its due praise, they might only be lending the means of currency to the opinions in whose service he has unwisely enlisted its energies ; while others, less able to appreciate his genius, and less likely to be anxious about suppressing his opinions, have been silent, by reason of their selfish fears,—dreading it may be, that by praising the *Revolt of Islam*, they might draw down upon their own heads some additional marks of that public disgust which followed their praises of *Rimini.*

Another cause which may be assigned for the silence of the critics should perhaps have operated more effectually upon ourselves; and this is, that the *Revolt of Islam*, although a fine, is, without all doubt, an obscure poem. Not that the main drift of the narrative is obscure, or even that there is any great difficulty in understanding the tendency of the under-current of its allegory,—but the author has composed his poem in much haste, and he has inadvertently left many detached parts, both of his story and his allusion, to be made out as the reader best can, from very inadequate data. The swing of his inspiration may be allowed to have hurried his own eye, *pro tempore*, over many chasms; but Mr. Shelley has no excuse for printing a very unfinished piece,—an error which he does not confess,—or indeed for many minor errors which he does confess in his very arrogant preface. The unskilful manner in which the allegory is brought out, and the doubt in which the reader is every now and then left, whether or no there be any allegory at all in the case; these alone are sufficient to render the perusal of this poem painful to persons of an active and ardent turn of mind; and, great as we conceive the merits of Mr. Shelley's poetry to be, these alone, we venture to prophesy, will be found sufficient to prevent the *Revolt of Islam* from ever becoming anything like a favourite with the multitude.

At present, having entered our general protest against the creed of the author, and sufficiently indicated to our readers of what species its errors are,—we are very willing to save ourselves the

unwelcome task of dwelling at any greater length upon these disagreeable parts of our subject. We are very willing to pass in silence the many faults of Mr. Shelley's opinions, and to attend to nothing but the vehicle in which these opinions are conveyed. As a philosopher, our author is weak and worthless;—our business is with him as a poet, and, as such, he is strong, nervous, original; well entitled to take his place near to the great creative masters, whose works have shed its truest glory around the age wherein we live. As a political and infidel treatise, the *Revolt of Islam* is contemptible;—happily a great part of it has no necessary connection either with politics or with infidelity. The native splendour of Mr. Shelley's faculties has been his safeguard from universal degradation, and a part at least, of his genius, has been consecrated to themes worthy of it and of him. In truth, what he probably conceives to be the most exquisite ornaments of his poetry, appear, in our eyes, the chief deformities upon its texture; and had the whole been framed like the passages which we shall quote,—as the *Revolt of Islam* would have been a purer, so we have no doubt, would it have been a nobler, a loftier, a more majestic, and a more beautiful poem.

We shall pass over, then, without comment, the opening part of this work, and the confused unsatisfactory allegories with which it is chiefly filled. It is sufficient to mention, that, at the close of the first canto, the poet supposes himself to be placed for a time in the regions of eternal repose, where the good and great of mankind are represented as detailing,

before the throne of the Spirit of Good, those earthly sufferings and labours which had prepared them for the possession and enjoyment of so blissful an abode. Among these are two, a man and a woman of Argolis, who, after rescuing their country for a brief space from the tyranny of the house of Othman, and accomplishing this great revolution by the force of persuasive eloquence and the sympathies of human love alone, without violence, bloodshed, or revenge,—had seen the fruit of all their toils blasted by foreign invasion, and the dethroned but not insulted tyrant replaced upon his seat; and who, finally, amidst all the darkness of their country's horizon, had died, without fear, the death of heroic martyrdom, gathering consolation, in the last pangs of their expiring nature, from the hope and confidence that their faith and example might yet raise up successors to their labours, and that they had neither lived nor died in vain.

In the persons of these martyrs, the poet has striven to embody his ideas of the power and loveliness of human affections; and, in their history, he has set forth a series of splendid pictures, illustrating the efficacy of these affections in overcoming the evils of private and of public life. It is in the portraying of that passionate love, which had been woven from infancy in the hearts of Laon and Cythna, and which, binding together all their impulses in one hope and one struggle, had rendered them through life no more than two different tenements for the inhabitation of the same enthusiastic spirit;—it is in the portraying

of this intense, overmastering, unfearing, unfading love, that Mr. Shelley has proved himself to be a genuine poet. Around his lovers, moreover, in the midst of all their fervours, he has shed an air of calm gracefulness, a certain majestic monumental stillness, which blends them harmoniously with the scene of their earthly existence, and realises in them our ideas of Greeks struggling for freedom in the best spirit of their fathers.—We speak of the general effect;—there are unhappily not a few passages in which the poet quits his vantage-ground, and mars the beauty of his personifications by an intermixture of thoughts, feelings, and passions, with which, of right, they have nothing to do.

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We forbear from making any comments on this strange narrative; because we could not do so without entering upon other points which we have already professed our intention of waving for the present. It will easily be seen, indeed, that neither the main interest nor the main merit of the poet at all consists in the conception of his plot, or in the arrangement of his incidents. His praise is, in our judgment, that of having poured over his narrative a very rare strength and abundance of poetic imagery and feeling,—of having steeped every word in the essence of his inspiration. The *Revolt of Islam* contains no detached passages at all comparable with some which our readers recollect in the works of the great poets our contemporaries; but neither does it contain any such intermixture of prosaic materials as

disfigure even the greatest of them. Mr. Shelley has displayed his possession of a mind intensely poetical, and of an exuberance of poetic language, perpetually strong and perpetually varied. In spite, moreover, of a certain perversion in all his modes of thinking, which, unless he gets rid of it, will ever prevent him from being acceptable to any considerable or respectable body of readers, he has displayed many glimpses of right understanding and generous feeling, which must save him from the unmingled condemnation even of the most rigorous judges. His destiny is entirely in his own hands; if he acts wisely, it cannot fail to be a glorious one; if he continues to pervert his talents, by making them the instruments of a base sophistry, their splendour will only contribute to render his disgrace the more conspicuous. Mr. Shelley, whatever his errors may have been, is a scholar, a gentleman, and a poet; and he must therefore despise from his soul the only eulogies to which he has hitherto been accustomed,—paragraphs from the *Examiner*, and sonnets from Johnny Keats. He has it in his power to select better companions; and if he does so, he may very securely promise himself abundance of better praise.

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine,
December 1818.

ESSAYS ON THE LAKE SCHOOL OF POETRY.

On the Habits of Thought, inculcated by Wordsworth.

As in this country the investigations of metaphysicians have been directed chiefly towards the laws of intellect and association, and as we have nothing which deserves the name of philosophy founded upon an examination of what human nature internally says of itself, or upon inquiries into the dependence of one feeling upon another; in short, as we have neither any Platonism, nor even any philosophy of the passions, we must turn to the poets, if we wish to hear what our literature says upon these subjects; for, by our speculative men, they have been left in utter silence, darkness, and uncertainty. If the practical turn of mind, which has always been characteristic of our nation, has led to these neglects, there is nothing more to be said; for the works of intellectual men should be moulded according to the character of those who are to read them; and nothing can obtain

much influence over life, if it finds not a broad foundation in the popular mind. Nevertheless, if philosophers profess to examine what human nature is, in the abstract, the peculiarities of their auditors will not serve as an excuse for slurring over particular branches of the subject, as if they had no existence.

Two things may be chiefly observed in Mr. Wordsworth's poetry; namely, first, an attempt to awaken in the minds of his countrymen certain *lumières* which they do not generally possess, and certain convictions of moral laws existing silently in the universe, and actually modifying events, in opposition to more palpable causes, in a manner similar to what is said to be taught by the philosophy of the Hindoos; and secondly, a thorough knowledge of all the beauties of the human affections, and of their mutual harmonies and dependencies. In both of these things, he has scarcely had any precursors, either among the poets or philosophers of his country. Some traces of the convictions above alluded to may be found in Spenser, and some fainter traces in Milton; whose turn of genius was decisively ascertained by the circumstances of his greater success in handling a subject, taken from the historical parts of the Old Testament, than one from the Christian Gospel. As for those who came after Milton, scarcely anything above the level of actual existence appears in their writings; and, upon the whole, it would seem that the kind of sublimity with which the English have always been chiefly delighted, consists merely in an exhibition of the strength of the human energies, which, in our most esteemed poems and

plays, are frequently not even elevated by self-devotion; witness *Coriolanus*, *Richard the Third*, Satan in *Paradise Lost*, the *Giaours* and *Corsairs*, etc., of modern days. In these pieces, elements of human nature, which are by no means of the highest kind, are represented boiling and foaming with great noise, and their turbidity is falsely taken for the highest kind of nobleness and magnificence.

Mr. Wordsworth has not followed out the national spirit in this, but has turned off into a totally different sphere of reflection, from whence no kind of strength appears great, because all strength is limited, and cannot appear sublime, if contrasted with strength a single degree above it. His contemplative Platonism searches for some image of perfection to admire, and perceives that the beauty of no limited being can consist in strength, but in its conformity to the moral harmony of the universe. Hence he can see no greatness in the movements of the mind, if they tend to no higher object than self-aggrandisement, which has ever its bounds that make it appear little; and, therefore, those objects which appear to him endowed with poetical beauty, are often such as appear homely to the eyes of others who measure them by a different standard. The small admiration he entertains for the undisciplined energies of human nature, leads him to a somewhat contemptuous estimation of active life, even when conduct is submitted to the restraints of morality. He thinks little has been done for the mind, unless those internal movements, also, which are without result in action, have been tuned into

beauty and regularity, and a complete balance and subordination established among the feelings by dint of long-continued meditation. On this subject his ideas cannot fail to recall to remembrance those Indian doctrines, which taught that the first step towards the perception of high moral truth, was the establishment of a certain stillness and equability within the mind. But Mr. Wordsworth should have proposed these Braminical notions elsewhere; for they are totally at variance with the stirring and tumultuous spirit of England. No philosophy or religion, purely contemplative, has ever taken a strong hold of the English mind; and no set of English devotees, however much they professed to be dead to the world, have been able to keep their hands out of temporal affairs. They have always found something that called for their interference, and have exchanged the pleasures of abstract contemplation, for the zeal of partisanship. Mr. Wordsworth seems averse to active life, chiefly, because he is afraid of losing sight of impressions which are only to be arrived at in the stillness of contemplation; and because he sees a risk, that the lower and coarser feelings being stirred into activity, amidst the bustle, may lose their subordination, and rise up so as to obscure the bright ideal image of human nature, which he would wish to retain always before him. Notions like these, however, must always appear ridiculous to the majority in England, where life is estimated as it produces external good or mischief. But, although Mr. Wordsworth's ideas have not met with

a very flattering reception, he seems no way blind to the manly integrity and substantial excellences of character that adorn his country, and which have so deep a root there, that, as Madame de Stael observes, they have never ceased to flourish even under the influence of speculative opinions, which would have withered them up elsewhere. Indeed, the moral speculations of England, have been very much a separate pastime of the understanding, which began and ended there, without ever drawing a single reflection from the depths of human nature. A remarkable trait in the history of our philosophy is, that Christianity has been as it were transposed by Paley into a more familiar key, and adapted throughout to the theory of utility; so that David Hume himself might almost play an accompaniment to it. And Paley has obtained a great deal of credit, for the performance of this good office to his countrymen.

One of the causes which have prevented Mr. Wordsworth's writings from becoming popular, is, that he does not confine himself like most other poets, to the task of representing poetical objects, or of moving our sympathies, but, also, proposes and maintains a system of philosophical opinions. In most of his poems, and in the *Excursion* especially, he scarcely makes poetry for its own sake, but chiefly as a vehicle for his doctrines, and the spirit of these doctrines is, unfortunately for his success, at variance with the philosophy at present most fashionable in this country. Although possessed of the requisite genius, he does

not seem to care for composing poems, adapted to the exclusive purpose of taking hold of the feelings of the people; and, among the philosophers, he is rejected, because he holds a different language from them. Besides, the habits of thought, in which he chiefly delights, are not calculated to produce that strength and vividness of diction, which must ever constitute one of the chief attractions of poetry. Imagination seems insufficient of itself to produce diction always nervous and poetical, without the aid of human passion and worldly observation. It is from these that the greatest poignancy of words must spring. As for the saltness of sagacity and wit, Mr. Wordsworth looks down upon it as a profane thing, and is well entitled to do so. If he were to descend into so low a region as that of jesting, he would probably succeed no better than old David Deans did, when he attempted a joke at his daughter's marriage dinner. But, as Mr. Wordsworth never jests, so his writings, perhaps, have some claim to be exempted from the pleasantries of others; which, indeed, can scarcely be directed with much success or effect against a person who faces ridicule so systematically, and who has always counted upon it beforehand.

Mr. Wordsworth has been thought to have more affinity to Milton than any other poet. If this is the case, the affinity is rather in manner than in substance. Milton has no idealism, not even in the *Paradise Regained*, where there was most scope for it. His poetry is, for the most part, quite literal; and the objects he describes have all a certain definiteness and

individuality, which separates them from the infinite. He has often endeavoured to present images, where everything should have been lost in sentiment. It is generally agreed, that among the most successful parts of *Paradise Lost*, are those which represent the character of the fallen angel; and yet these sublime and tragical soliloquies are founded chiefly on personal feeling; which, although it may be made a source of consummate pathos and dramatic beauty, is certainly not the region of the human mind, from whence the highest possible impressions are to be drawn. Terrible acts of divine power, and, on the other hand, force of will, and obdurate pride in the rebel spirits, are the highest moral elements exhibited; but, if we look to what composes some of the finest passages in Wordsworth, we shall be inclined, (theoretically at least), to prefer them to the best of Milton, as conveying more exalted meaning, whether the poetical merit of the vehicle be equal or not. The sublimity drawn from terror, collision, tumult, or discord, of any kind, has always the disadvantage of being transient; and, therefore, cannot be considered as equal to those openings into immutable brightness and harmony, which are sometimes to be met with in Wordsworth. One beauty cannot fail to strike the reader of his poetry; and that is, the perfect homogeneousness of its spirit. A systematic correspondence pervades the whole, so that the perusal of one piece frequently leads the reader's own mind into a tract of thought, which is afterwards found to be developed by the poet himself, in some other performance. The defects of his poetry

originate in the same system of thought which produces its beauties. They are not the result of casual whims, or imperfections of taste. Certain great convictions of sentiment have so completely pervaded his mind, as to produce a degree of consistency in all its emanations, that we vainly look for in works founded upon observation. It is remarkable that even the external characteristics of his poetry are similar to what we are told an analogous turn of internal thought anciently produced among the Hindoos. "From the descriptive poems of the Indians," says Schlegel, in his lectures on the history of literature, "we must seek to gather what influence those opinions had on human life and all its relations and feelings; what sort of poetry, and what sort of feeling of the lovely and beautiful, were produced among the Indians by the adoption of ideas to us so foreign and unaccountable. The first things which strike us in the Indian poetry are, that the tender feeling of solitude, and the all-animated world of plants, which is so engagingly represented in the dramatic poetry of the Sokuntola; and those charming pictures of female truth and constancy, as well as of the beauty and loveliness of infantine nature, which are still more conspicuous in the older epic version of the same Indian legend. Neither can we observe, without wonder and admiration, that depth of moral feeling with which the poet styles conscience 'the solitary seer in the heart, from whose eye nothing is hid,' and which leads him to represent sin as something so incapable of concealment, that every transgression is not only known to

conscience, and all the gods, but felt with a sympathetic shudder by those elements themselves which we call inanimate, by the sun, the moon, the fire, the air, the heaven, the earth, the flood, and the deep, as a crying outrage against nature, and a derangement of the universe."

Whoever wishes to understand Mr. Wordsworth's philosophical opinions, will find them developed in their most perfect form, in the *Excursion;* but those who wish to judge merely how far he possesses the powers commonly called poetical, will do best to read his Lyrical Ballads, and smaller Poems, where pathos, imagination, and knowledge of human nature, are often presented by themselves, without any obstrusive or argumentative reference to a system. At the same time, the reverential awe, and the far extended sympathy with which he looks upon the whole system of existing things, and the silent moral connections which he supposes to exist among them, are visible throughout all his writings. He tunes his mind to nature almost with a feeling of religious obligation; and where others behold only beautiful colours, making their appearance according to optical laws, or feel pleasant physical sensations resulting from a pure atmosphere, or from the odoriferous exhalations of herbage, or enjoy the pleasure of measuring an extended prospect, as an amusement for the eye, this poet, (whether justly or not), thinks he traces something more in the spectacle than the mere reflection of his own feelings painted upon external objects, by means of the association of ideas; or, at least,

seems to consider what we then behold as the instantaneous creation of the mind.

> "Oh then what soul was his, when on the tops
> Of the high mountains, he beheld the sun
> Rise up, and bathe the world in light! He looked,—
> Ocean and earth, the solid frame of earth,
> And ocean's liquid mass beneath him lay
> In gladness and deep joy. The clouds were touched,
> And in their silent faces did he read
> Unutterable love. Sound needed none,
> Nor any voice of joy. His spirit drank
> The spectacle; sensation, soul, and form,
> All melted into him; they swallowed up
> His animal being.—
> "All things there
> Breathed immortality; revolving life
> And greatness still revolving; infinite;
> Their littleness was not; the least of things
> Seemed infinite; and there his spirit shaped
> Her prospects, nor did he believe; he saw."

The relation which the consideration of moral pain or deformity bears to this far-extended sympathy with the universe, is alluded to in another passage of the *Excursion.*

> "My friend, enough to sorrow you have given;
> The purposes of wisdom ask no more;
> Be wise and cheerful; and no longer read
> The forms of things with an unworthy eye.
> She[1] sleeps in the calm earth, and peace is there.
> I well remember that those very plumes,
> Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall,
> By mist and silent rain-drops silver'd o'er,
> As once I passed, did to my heart convey
> So still an image of tranquillity,

[1] One who had died of a broken heart.

So calm and still, and looked so beautiful,
Amid the uneasy thoughts that filled my mind,
That what we feel of sorrow and despair,
From ruin and from change, and all the grief
The passing shows of being leave behind,
Appeared an idle dream, that could not live
Where meditation was."

Notions like those of Mr. Wordsworth are evidently suited only to a life purely contemplative; but that universality of spirit, which becomes true philosophy, should forbid, in persons of different habits, any blind or sudden condemnation of them. No individual can say what are all the internal suggestions of the human faculties, unless he has varied his mode of existence sufficiently to afford fit opportunities for their development.—The facts of consciousness are admitted to be as much facts as those of the senses; but, at the same time, we cannot get individuals to agree what they are, and, while things remain in this state of uncertainty, the first duty is certainly that of liberality of mind.

Wordsworth's habit of dwelling as much upon the rest of the universe as upon man, has given his poetry an air of greater joyfulness and sunshine, than it could have possessed if human life had been his more constant theme. He turns with ever new delight to objects which exhibit none of the harshness and discrepancy of the human world.

"The blackbird on the summer trees,
The lark upon the hill,
Let loose their carols when they please,
Are quiet when they will.

With nature do they never wage
A foolish strife; they see
A happy youth, and their old age
Is beautiful and free.

Down to the vale this water steers,
How merrily it goes,
'Twill murmur on a thousand years,
And flow as now it flows."

When he does turn his attention upon life, we find always the most beautiful echoes of Christian tenderness and sorrow. In an elegy, suggested by a picture representing a storm, he alludes to the bitter recollection of a domestic loss which had befallen him, and is pleased to see the image of pain reflected in external nature.

"Oh, 'tis a passionate work!—Yet wise and well;
Well chosen is the spirit that is here;
That hulk that labours in the deadly swell,
This rueful sky, the pageantry of fear.
And this huge castle, standing here sublime,
I love to see the look with which it braves,
Cased in the unfeeling armour of old time,
The lightning, the fierce wind, and trampling waves.
Farewell, farewell the heart that lives alone,
Housed in a dream, at distance from the kind;
Such happiness, wherever it is known,
Is to be pitied; for 'tis surely blind.
But welcome fortitude, and patient cheer,
And frequent sights of what is to be born,
Such sights, or worse, as are before me here.—
Not without hope we suffer and we mourn."

Surely nothing can be finer than this. It is

impressed with the true character of that kind of social sentiment, which is drawn from a source not liable to fail. In his sonnets, we see what form citizenship is made to assume, when growing up in contiguity with the other habits of mind cultivated by Wordsworth. How these compositions, so pregnant with feeling and reflection, upon the most interesting topics, should not have been more generally known, is a problem difficult to be solved.

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In some respects Mr. Wordsworth may be considered as the Rousseau of the present times. Both of them were educated among the mountains, at a distance from the fermentations of social life, and acquired, from their way of existence, certain peculiar sentimental habits of meditation, which were pitched in a different key from the callous, sarcastic, and practical way of thinking, prevalent among their contemporaries of the cities. Rousseau mingled in the throng; but found himself there like a man dropped out of the clouds. The peculiarity of his habits made him wretched; and his irritation perverted the employment of his genius. Mr. Wordsworth has acted more wisely in keeping aloof, and continuing to cultivate his mind according to its pristine bias, and forbearing to grapple too closely with the differently educated men of cities. Rousseau makes a fine encomium upon the mountains, which, as it is connected with the present subject, we shall quote:—

"A general impression, (which everybody experiences,

though all do not observe it), is, that, on high mountains where the air is pure and subtle, we feel greater lightness and agility of body, and more serenity in the mind. The pleasures are there less violent; the passions are more moderate; *meditations receive there a certain great and sublime character proportioned to the objects that strike us;* a certain tranquil pleasure which has nothing sensual. We are there grave without melancholy; quiet without indolence; contented with existing and thinking; all too lively pleasures are blunted, and lose the sharp points which render them painful; they leave in the heart only a slight and agreeable emotion; and thus an happy climate makes the passions of mankind subservient to his felicity, which elsewhere are his torment. I question whether any violent agitation or vapourish disorder could hold out against such an abode if continued for some time; and I am surprised that baths of the salutary and beneficial air of the mountains are not one of the principal remedies of medicine and morality."

WESTMINSTER REVIEW.

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POEMS, CHIEFLY LYRICAL.

By ALFRED TENNYSON.

154 *pp. Wilson*, 12*mo.* 1830.

It would be a pity that poetry should be an exception to the great law of progression that obtains in human affairs; and it is not. The machinery of a poem is not less susceptible of improvement than the machinery of a cotton-mill; nor is there any better reason why the one should retrograde from the days of Milton, than the other from those of Arkwright. Of course we do not mean that the cases are precisely parallel, but the difference is not so much in favour of the perfectibility of the cotton-mill as is often imagined. Man cannot be less progressive than his own works and contrivances; in fact it is by his improvement that they are improved; and the mechanical arts are continually becoming superior to what they were, just because the men who are occupied in or about those arts have grown wiser than their predecessors, and have the advantage of a clearer knowledge of principles, an experience more extended or more accurately recorded, and perhaps a stronger

stimulus to invention. Their progressiveness is merely a consequence from, a sort of reflection of, the progressiveness of his nature; but, poetry is far nearer and dearer; it is essential to that nature itself; it is part and parcel of his constitution; and can only retrograde in the retrogradation of humanity.

There is nothing mysterious, or anomalous, in the power of producing poetry, or in that of its enjoyment; neither the one nor the other is a supernatural gift bestowed capriciously nobody knows how, when, or why. It may be a compound, but it is not incapable of analysis; and although our detection of the component parts may not enable us to effect their combination at pleasure, it may yet guide us to many useful conclusions and well-grounded anticipations. The elements of poetry are universal. The exercise of the organs of sight and sense stimulates man to some degree of descriptive poetry; wherever there is passion, there is dramatic poetry; wherever enthusiasm, there is lyric poetry; wherever reflection, there is metaphysical poetry. It is as widely diffused as the electric fluid. It may be seen flashing out by fits and starts all the world over. The most ignorant talk poetry when they are in a state of excitement, the firmly-organized think and feel poetry with every breeze of sensation that sweeps over their well-tuned nerves. There is an unfathomable store of it in human nature; the species must fail before that can be exhausted; the only question is, whether there be any reason why these permanent elements should not be wrought into their combined form, in the

future, with a facility and power which bear some direct ratio to the progress of society.

So far as poetry is dependent upon physical organisation; and doubtless it is to some extent so dependent; there is no reason why it should deteriorate. Eyes and ears are organs which nature finishes off with very different gradations of excellence. Nervous systems vary from the finest degree of susceptibility down to the toughness of a coil of hempen cable. *Poeta nascitur* in a frame the most favourable to acute perception and intense enjoyment of the objects of sense; and it would be difficult to show that poets are not, and will not continue to be, produced as excellent as they have been, and as frequently. Why, then, should not those species of poetry which may be termed its music and its painting, which spring from an appeal to our sense of the beautiful in form or colour and of harmonious modulation, abound as much as heretofore? He is no lover of nature who has any notion that the half of her loveliness has ever yet been told. Descriptive poetry is the most exhaustible: but our coal mines will fail us much sooner. No man ever yet saw all the beauty of a landscape. He may have watched it from the rising to the setting sun, and through the twilight and the moonlight, and the starlight, and all round the seasons, but he is deceived if he thinks then that it has nothing more for him. Indeed it is not he who ever will think so, but the man who drove down one day and back the next, because he found the place so dull. The world has tired of descriptive

poetry because it has been deluged with what was neither poetical nor descriptive. The world was quite right to be no longer tolerant of the repetition of conventional, traditionary unfelt, and unmeaning phrases. But Cowper did not find the ground pre-occupied. Bucolics, and Georgics, and Eclogues, and Pastorals, all made reverential room for his honest verses; and the shelf on which they took their stand is far from crowded. Nature will never cease to be poetical, nor society either. Spears and shields; gods, goddesses and muses; and all the old scenery and machinery may indeed wear out. That is of little consequence. The age of chivalry was but one, and poetry has many ages. The classical and romantic schools are both but sects of a religion which is universal. Even the fields which have been most frequently reaped will still bear harvests; and rich ones too. Bards began with battles some thousands of years ago, and yet nobody ever wrote the Fight of Flodden field till it was indited by Scott, nor did any one anticipate Campbell's glorious ballad of the battle of Hohenlinden. Genius is never anticipated. No wit ever complained that all the good things had been said; nor will any poet, to the world's end, find that all worthy themes have been sung. Is not the French Revolution as good as the siege of Troy? And the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers on the shores of America, as that of the Trojan fugitives on the coast of Italy? The world has never been more disposed to make the want of a hero "an uncommon want" than in these

supposed unpoetical days on which we are fallen. And were they not provided, poetry might do without them. The old epics will probably never be surpassed, any more than the old coats of mail; and for the same reason; nobody wants the article; its object is accomplished by other means; they are become mere curiosities. A long story, with a plot to be ravelled and unravelled, and characters to be developed, and descriptions to be introduced, and a great moral lesson at the end of it, is now always done, and best done, in prose. A large portion always was prose in fact, and necessarily so; but literary superstition kept up the old forms after everybody felt them intolerably wearisome and soporific, though few dared be so heretical as to say so, until the utilitarian spirit showed itself even in poetical criticism, and then the dull farce ended. This we take to be a great reformation. We have left off singing what ought only to be said, but the singing is neither the less nor the worse on that account. Nor will it be. The great principle of human improvement is at work in poetry as well as everywhere else. What is it that is reforming our criminal jurisprudence? What is shedding its lights over legislation? What purifies religions? What makes all arts and sciences more available for human comfort and enjoyment? Even that which will secure a succession of creations out of the unbounded and everlasting materials of poetry, our ever-growing acquaintance with the philosophy of mind and of man, and the increasing facility

with which that philosophy is applied. This is the essence of poetic power, and he who possesses it never need furbish up ancient armour, or go to the East Kehama-hunting or bulbul-catching. Poetry, like charity, begins at home. Poetry, like morality, is founded on the precept, know thyself. Poetry, like happiness, is in the human heart. Its inspiration is of that which is in man, and it will never fail because there are changes in costume and grouping. What is the vitality of the *Iliad?* Character; nothing else. All the rest is only read either out of antiquarianism or of affectation. Why is Shakespeare the greatest of poets? Because he was one of the greatest philosophers. We reason on the conduct of his characters with as little hesitation as if they were real living human beings. Extent of observation, accuracy of thought, and depth of reflection, were the qualities which won the prize of sovereignty for his imagination, and the effect of these qualities was practically to anticipate, so far as was needful for his purposes, the mental philosophy of a future age. Metaphysics must be the stem of poetry for the plant to thrive; but, if the stem flourishes we are not likely to be at a loss for leaves, flowers, and fruit. Now whatever theories may have come into fashion, the real science of mind advances with the progress of society like all other sciences. The poetry of the last forty years already shows symptoms of life in exact proportion as it is imbued with this science. There is least of it in the exotic legends of Southey, and the feudal romances of Scott. More of it, though in different

ways, in Byron and Campbell. In Shelley there would have been more still, had he not devoted himself to unsound and mystical theories. Most of all in Coleridge and Wordsworth. They are all going or gone; but here is a little book as thoroughly and unitedly metaphysical and poetical in its spirit as any of them; and sorely shall we be disappointed in its author if it be not the precursor of a series of productions which shall beautifully illustrate our speculations, and convincingly prove their soundness.

Do not let our readers be alarmed. These poems are anything but heavy; anything but stiff and pedantic, except in one particular, which shall be noticed before we conclude; anything but cold and logical. They are graceful, very graceful; they are animated, touching, and impassioned. And they are so, precisely because they are philosophical; because they are not made up of metrical cant and conventional phraseology; because there is sincerity where the author writes from experience, and accuracy whether he writes from experience or observation; and he only writes from experience or observation, because he has felt and thought, and learned to analyse thought and feeling; because his own mind is rich in poetical associations, and he has wisely been content with its riches; and because, in his composition, he has not sought to construct an elaborate and artificial harmony, but only to pour forth his thoughts in those expressive and simple melodies whose meaning, truth, and power, are soonest recognised and the longest felt.

The most important department in which metaphysical science has been a pioneer for poetry is in the analysis of particular states of mind; a work which is now performed with ease, power, and utility as much increased, as in the grosser dissections of the anatomical lecturer. Hence the poet, more fortunate than the physician, has provision made for an inexhaustible supply of subjects. A new world is discovered for him to conquer. The poets of antiquity rarely did more than incidentally touch this class of topics; the external world had not yet lost its freshness, situations, and the outward expression of the thoughts, feelings and passions generated by those situations, were a province so much nearer at hand, and presented so much to be done and enjoyed that they rested there content, like the two tribes and a half of Israel, who sought not to cross the narrow boundary that separated them from a better and richer country. Nor let them be blamed; it was for the philosophers to be the first discoverers and settlers, and for poetry afterwards to reap the advantage of their labours. This has only been done recently, or rather is only beginning to be done at all. Metaphysical systems and discussions in verse, there have been indeed, from Lucretius down to Akenside. But they have generally had just argument enough to spoil the poetry, and just poetry enough to spoil the argument. They resembled paintings of the bones, arteries, veins, and muscles; very bad as a substitute to the anatomist for the real substances in the human body, and still worse for the artist as the materials for a pleasant

picture. Science, mental or physical, cannot be taught poetically; but the power derived from science may be used poetically; and metaphysics may do as much for the poet as anatomy has done for the painter,—in truth, more,—for the painter's knowledge of the human frame does not furnish him with distinct subjects for the exercise of his art; we have just remarked the unfitness. The benefit which the painter derives is that of being able to delineate the external appearances of the living body with greater truth and effect. And while the poet has an analogous advantage from mental science in the greater truth and effect of his delineations of external action, character, passion, and all that belongs to situation and grouping; he also finds in the phenomena exhibited in moral dissection, (though not in the operation itself, in the application of the logical scalpel), some of the finest originals for his pictures; and they exist in infinite variety.

Mr. Tennyson has some excellent specimens of this class. He seems to obtain entrance into a mind as he would make his way into a landscape; he climbs the pineal gland as if it were a hill in the centre of the scene; looks around on all objects with their varieties of form, their movements, their shades of colour, and their mutual relations and influences; and forthwith produces as graphic a delineation in the one case as Wilson or Gainsborough could have done in the other, to the great enrichment of our gallery of intellectual scenery. In the *Supposed Confessions of a second-rate sensitive mind not in unity with*

itself (pp. 31-42), there is an extraordinary combination of deep reflection, metaphysical analysis, picturesque description, dramatic transition, and strong emotion. The author personates, (he can personate anything he pleases, from an angel to a grasshopper), a timid sceptic, but who must evidently always remain such, and yet be miserable in his scepticism; whose early associations, and whose sympathies, make religion a necessity to his heart; yet who has not lost his pride in the prowess of his youthful infidelity; who is tossed hither and thither on the conflicting currents of feeling and doubt, without that vigorous intellectual decision which alone could "ride in the whirlwind and direct the storm," until at last he disappears with an exclamation which remains on the ear like

> "the bubbling cry
> Of some strong swimmer in his agony."

Now without intruding any irreverent comparison or critical profanity, we do honestly think this state of mind as good a subject for poetical description as even the shield of Achilles itself. Such topics are more in accordance with the spirit and intellect of the age than those about which poetry has been accustomed to be conversant; their adoption will effectually redeem it from the reproach of being frivolous and enervating; and of their affinity with the best pictorial qualities of poetry we have conclusive evidence in this very composition. The delineations of the trustful infant, the praying mother, the dying lamb, are as

good as anything of the kind can be; while those of the supposed author's emotions as he gazes on "Christians with happy countenances," or stands by the Christian grave, or realises again, with a mixture of self-admiration and self-reproach, "the unsunned freshness of his strength," when he "went forth in quest of truth," are of a higher order, and are more powerfully, though not less gracefully finished.

Our author has the secret of the transmigration of the soul. He can cast his own spirit into any living thing, real or imaginary. Scarcely Vishnu himself becomes incarnate more easily, frequently, or perfectly. And there is singular refinement, as well as solid truth, in his impersonations, whether they be of inferior creatures or of such elemental beings as syrens, (p. 148) as mermen (p. 24) and mermaidens (p. 27). He does not merely assume their external shapes, and exhibit his own mind masquerading. He takes their senses, feelings, nerves, and grain, along with their names and local habitations; still it is himself in them, modified but not absorbed by their peculiar constitution and mode of being. In *The Merman* one seems to feel the principle of thought injected by a strong volition into the cranium of the finny worthy, and coming under all the influences, as thinking principles do, of the physical organisation to which it is for the time allied; for a moment the identification is complete; and then a consciousness of contrast springs up between the reports of external objects brought to the mind by the senses, and those which it has been

accustomed to receive; and this consciousness gives to the description a most poetical colouring:

> "There would be neither moon nor star;
> But the wave would make music above us afar,—
> Low thunder and light in the magic night;—
> Neither moon nor star
> We would call aloud in the dreary dells," etc.

The Mermaid is beautifully discriminated, and most delicately drawn. She is the younger sister of Undine; or Undine herself before she had a soul. And the Syrens,—who could resist these Sea Fairies, as the author prefers calling them?

. . . . . .

The poet has here done, in the character of the Sea Fairies, that which he has several times done in his own person, and always admirably; he has created a scene out of the character, and made the feeling within generate an appropriate assemblage of external objects. Every mood of the mind has its own outward world, or rather makes its own outward world. But it is not always, perhaps with sensitive and imaginative minds it is seldom, that the external objects, and their qualities will be seen through the medium of congeniality. It is thus in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso;* but Milton was a happy man; the visions of both those poems were seen with the eyes of happiness, the only difference being that the one depicts a state of light-hearted, and the other of sober-minded enjoyment. There is not less truth, perhaps a more

refined observation, in the opposite course which our author has taken in the two poems, *Nothing will die*, and *All things will die*. The outward objects, at the commencement of each, are precisely the same; the states of mind, are in contrast; and each seizes with avidity on some appearance which is uncongenial with itself. He who thinks that nothing will die, yet looks with wondering and almost wearied eye on the ever-flowing stream, etc.; and he who feels that all things must die, gazes mournfully on those same objects in the "gayest, happiest attitude," which his own fancy has unconsciously compelled them to assume. There is this difference, however, that the felicitous conviction, in the first poem, enables the mind to recover itself with a sort of elastic bound; while in the second the external beauty and enjoyment, being at permanent variance with the tone of feeling, the mind after a melancholy recognition of their loveliness sinks into unmixed gloom, and surrounds itself with objects of deeper and darker shade. We shall be better understood by quoting the commencement of each.

NOTHING WILL DIE.

"When will the stream be aweary of flowing
Under my eye?
When will the wind be aweary of blowing
Over the sky?
When will the clouds be aweary of fleeting?
When will the heart be aweary of beating?
And nature die?
Never, oh! never, nothing will die;

The stream flows,
The wind blows;
The cloud fleets,
The heart beats,
Nothing will die."

ALL THINGS WILL DIE.

"Clearly the blue river chimes in its flowing
Under my eye;
Warmly and broadly the south winds are blowing
Over the sky.
One after another the white clouds are fleeting;
Every heart this May morning in joyance is beating,
Full merrily;
Yet all things must die.
The stream will cease to flow;
The wind will cease to blow;
The clouds will cease to fleet,
The heart will cease to beat
For all things must die."

Both poems conclude nearly in the same terms, with the exception of a discriminative epithet or two; but expressing in the one case an exulting joyousness, "So let the wind range"; and in the other a reckless and desperate gaiety, just as religion and infidelity sometimes approximate, in terms, to the inculcation of the same moral; and while the preacher of immortality cries "rejoice evermore," the expectant of annihilation shouts, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

Mariana is, we are disposed to think, although there are several poems which rise up reproachfully in our recollection as we say so, altogether the most

perfect composition in the volume. The whole of this poem, of eighty-four lines, is generated by the legitimate process of poetical creation, as that process is conducted in a philosophical mind, from a half sentence in Shakespeare. There is no mere amplification; it is all production; and production from that single germ. That must be a rich intellect, in which thoughts thus take root and grow. Mariana, the forsaken betrothed of Angelo, is described in *Measure for Measure*, as living in seclusion at "the moated grange." Mr. Tennyson knows the place well; the ruinous, old, lonely house, the neglected garden, the forlorn stagnation of the locality.

> "About a stone-cast from the wall,
> A sluice with blackened waters slept,
> And o'er it many, round and small,
> The clustered marishmosses crept.
> Hard by a poplar shook alway,
> All silver-green with gnarled bark,
> For leagues no other tree did dark
> The level waste, the rounding grey."

And here it was, that the deserted one lingered day after day in that "hope deferred which maketh the heart sick." The dreariness of the abode and the surrounding scenery was nothing to her;

> "She only said, 'My life is dreary,
> He cometh not,' she said;
> She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
> I would that I were dead!'"

The poem takes us through the circuit of four-and-

twenty hours of this dreary life. Through all the changes of the night and day she has but one feeling, the variation of which is only by different degrees of acuteness and intensity in the misery it produces; and again we feel, before its repetition, the coming of the melancholy burthen,—

> "And ever when the moon was low,
> And the shrill winds were up an' away,
> In the white curtain, to and fro,
> She saw the gusty shadow sway.
> But when the moon was very low,
> And wild winds bound within their cell,
>
> The shadow of the poplar fell
> Upon her bed, across her brow.
> She only said, 'The night is dreary,
> He cometh not,' she said;
> She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
> I would that I were dead.'"

The day, by its keener expectancy, was more harassing and agitating than the night; and by its sights and sounds, in that lonely place, and under the strange interpretations of a morbid fancy and a breaking heart, did yet more "confound her sense." Her deserted parents, the grey-headed domestics that had nursed her infancy in her father's house, seemed to be there; she recognised them, and what would they with her?

> "Old faces glimmered through the doors,
> Old footsteps trod the upper floors,
> Old voices called her from without."

Again the hour passed at which Angelo used to arrive; again the evening is come when he used to be there, where he never would be again; the bright sunshiny evening, blazing and fading; and

> "——most she loathed the hour
> When the thick-moted sunbeam lay
> Athwart the chambers, and the day
> Down-sloped was westering in his bower.
> Then she said, 'I am very dreary,
> He will not come,' she said;
> She wept, 'I am aweary, aweary,
> Oh God, that I were dead!'"

A considerable number of the poems are amatory; they are the expression not of heartless sensuality, nor of a sickly refinement, nor of fantastic devotion, but of manly love; and they illustrate the philosophy of the passion while they exhibit various phases of its existence, and embody its power. An arrangement of them might be made which should depict the whole history of passion from its birth to its apotheosis, or its death.

THE BURIAL OF LOVE.

> "His eyes in eclipse,
> Pale cold his lips,
> The light of his hopes unfed,
> Mute his tongue,
> His bow unstrung
> With the tears he hath shed,
> Backward drooping his graceful head,
> Love is dead:
> His last arrow is sped;

He hath not another dart ;
Go,—carry him to his dark death-bed ;
Bury him in the cold cold heart,—
Love is dead."

Had we space we should discuss this topic. It is of incalculable importance to society. Upon what love is, depends what woman is, and upon what woman is, depends what the world is, both in the present and the future. There is not a greater moral necessity in England than that of a reformation in female education. The boy is a son ; the youth is a lover ; and the man who thinks lightly of the elevation of character and the extension of happiness which woman's influence is capable of producing, and ought to be directed to the production of, in society, is neither the wisest of philosophers nor the best of patriots. How long will it be before we shall have read to better purpose the eloquent lessons, and the yet more eloquent history, of that gifted and glorious being, Mary Wollstonecraft ?

Mr. Tennyson sketches females as well as ever did Sir Thomas Lawrence. His portraits are delicate, his likenesses, (we will answer for them), perfect, and they have life, character, and individuality. They are nicely assorted also to all the different gradations of emotion and passion which are expressed in common with the descriptions of them. There is an appropriate object for every shade of feeling, from the light touch of a passing admiration, to the triumphant madness of soul and sense, or the deep and everlasting anguish of survivorship.

Lilian is the heroine of the first stage :—

> "Airy, fairy Lilian,
> Flitting, fairy Lilian,
> When I ask her if she loves me,
> Claps her tiny hands above me,
> Laughing all she can;
> She'll not tell me if she love me,
> Cruel little Lilian."

Madeline indicates that another degree has been taken in the freemasonry of love, "smiling, frowning evermore" (p. 22). And so we are conducted through various gradations, to *Isabel*, "the stately flower of female fortitude, and perfect wifehood," to the intense and splendid passion of *Hero*, and to the deep pathos of the ballad and dirge of *Oriana*.

We had noted many other passages for extract or remark, but our limits are prescribed and almost arrived at. We should also have illustrated the felicitous effect often produced by the iteration of a word or sentence so posited that it conveys a different meaning or shade of meaning, excites a varied kind of emotion, and is involuntarily uttered in a different tone. There are many beautiful instances of this kind. In the ballad of *Oriana*, and in the songs, repetition, with a slight variation of epithet, is also practised with great power. Rousseau's *air des trois notes* is only a curiosity; Mr. Tennyson has made some very touching, and some very animating melodies, of little more than that number of words. He is a master of musical combinations. His songs set themselves, and generate their own tunes, as all songs

do which are good for anything; but they are not many. Perhaps our author is only surpassed, among recent poets, by Coleridge, in the harmony of his versification.

It would also have been pleasant to have transcribed and analysed such pictures as those of *The Dying Swan*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Adeline*, etc.; and to have shown how the author can breathe his own spirit into unconscious things, making them instinct with life and feeling. One stanza of an autumnal song may intimate to some readers the facility and grace with which he identifies himself with nature.

> "A spirit haunts the year's last hours,
> Dwelling amid these yellowing bowers;
> To himself he talks;
> For at eventide, listening earnestly,
> At his work you may hear him sob and sigh
> In the walks;
> Earthward he boweth the heavy stalks
> Of the mouldering flowers:
> Heavily hangs the broad sunflower
> Over its grave i' the earth so chilly;
> Heavily hangs the hollyhock,
> Heavily hangs the tiger lily."

We must protest against the irregularities of measure, and the use of antiquated words and obsolete pronunciation, in which our author indulges so freely. He exposes himself thereby to the charge, and we think not unfairly, of indolence and affectation. There are few variations of effect which a skilful artist cannot produce, if he will but take the

pains,—without deviating from that regularity of measure which is one of the original elements of poetical enjoyment; made so by the tendency of the human frame to periodical movements; and the continued sacrifice of which is but ill compensated to the disappointed ear by any occasional, and not otherwise attainable, correspondence between the movement of a verse, and the sense which it is intended to convey. Nor certainly, is any thing gained by a song's being studded with words which to most readers may require a glossary.

Mr. Tennyson has the propensity which Shelley had, to use a word or two which young ladies of the present day are not accustomed to read or sing in the parlour; in singing, we believe, the toleration is greater than in reading or conversation; sentences, avoiding the words, but meaning much worse, are not generally proscribed.

That these poems will have a very rapid and extensive popularity we do not anticipate. Their very originality will prevent their being generally appreciated for a time. But that time will come, we hope, to a not far distant end. They demonstrate the possession of powers, to the future direction of which we look with some anxiety. A genuine poet has deep responsibilities to his country and the world, to the present and future generations, to earth and heaven. He, of all men, should have distinct and worthy objects before him, and consecrate himself to their promotion. It is thus that he best consults the glory of his art, and his own lasting fame. Mr.

Tennyson has a dangerous quality in that facility of impersonation on which we have remarked, and by which he enters so thoroughly into the most strange and wayward idiosyncrasies of other men. It must not degrade him into a poetical harlequin. He has higher work to do than that of disporting himself amongst "mystics" and "flowing philosophers." He knows that "the poet's mind is holy ground;" he knows that the poet's portion is to be

> "Dower'd with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,
> The love of love;"

he has shown, in the lines from which we quote, his own just conception of the grandeur of a poet's destiny; and we look to him for its fulfilment. It is not for such men to sink into mere verse-makers for the amusement of themselves or others. They can influence the associations of unnumbered minds; they can command the sympathies of unnumbered hearts; they can disseminate principles; they can give those principles power over men's imaginations; they can excite in a good cause the sustained enthusiasm that is sure to conquer; they can blast the laurels of the tyrants, and hollow the memories of the martyrs of patriotism; they can act with a force, the extent of which it is difficult to estimate, upon national feelings and character, and consequently upon national happiness. If our estimate of Mr. Tennyson be correct, he too is a poet; and many years hence may be read his juvenile description of that character with the proud consciousness that it

has become the description and history of his own work:

"So many minds did gird their orbs with beams,
Though one did fling the fire,
Heaven flowed upon the soul in many dreams
Of high desire.

Thus truth was multiplied on truth, the world
Like a great garden showed,
And through the wreaths of floating dark upcurled,
Rare sunrise flowed.

And Freedom reared in that august sunrise
Her beautiful bold brow."

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